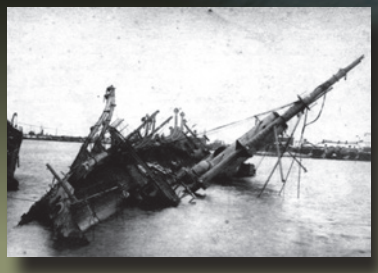
WARSHIPS IN THE BALTIC CAMPAIGN 1918–20

The Royal Navy takes on the Bolsheviks



ANGUS KONSTAM

ILLUSTRATED BY ADAM TOOBY

NEW VANGUARD 305

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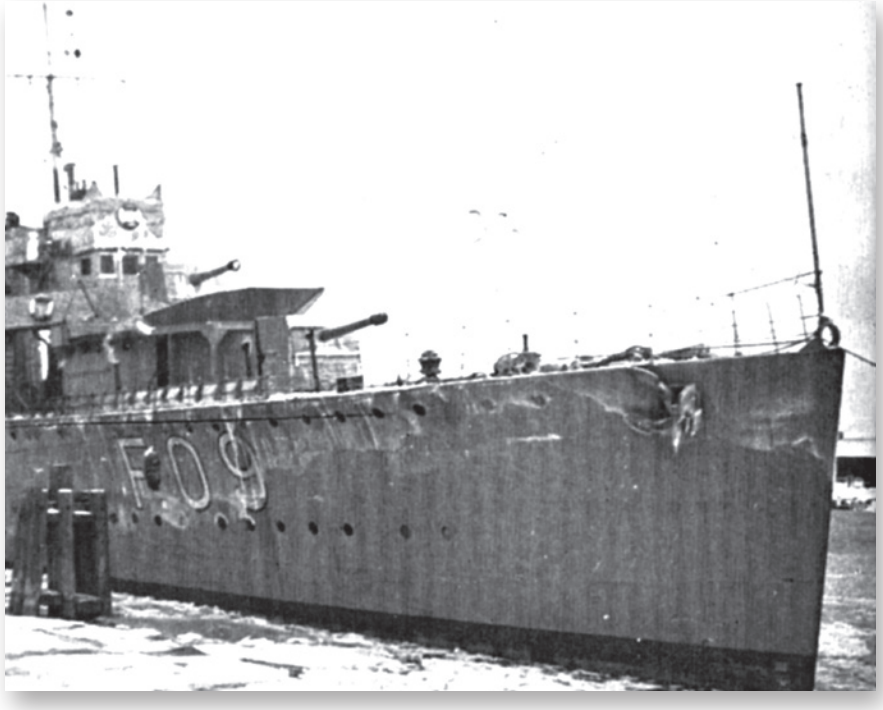

ANGUS KONSTAM ILLUSTRATED BY ADAM TOOBY

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WARSHIPS IN THE BALTIC CAMPAIGN 1918–20

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INTRODUCTION

On 26 November 1918, just over two weeks after the end of World War I, five British light cruisers left Scotland, bound for the Baltic. They would form the core of a hastily assembled Allied naval force, the mission of which was to protect Allied interests in this volatile corner of northern Europe. These ships and crews, and those that followed them, would soon become embroiled in a multi-sided conflict which centred around the struggle for independence by the fledgling Baltic States of Estonia and Latvia. They would also find themselves waging an undeclared war against the Soviet Baltic Fleet. This would be the only time in history when British and Soviet warships would fight each other.

In late 1918 the Baltic was one of the most volatile regions in Europe. The Russian Empire had imploded, and the Bolsheviks had seized control of the country's centres of power. Elsewhere in Russia, anti-Bolshevik White forces were determined to reclaim control of Russia. Even though the war was over,

R. Adml Cowan's flagship *Caledon* at sea off Libau, in mid-January 1919, in a painting by Cecil King. From there, *Caledon* steamed north to bombard Soviet troops around the Latvian port of Windau (now Ventspils), and so drive them from the town.

thousands of German troops still occupied Russia's Baltic provinces, where their commanders hoped to establish a pro-German Baltic state. Finland had recently declared its independence, while to the south, across the Gulf of Finland, nationalists in Estonia and Latvia planned to do the same, despite the combined threats of Reds, Whites and Germans. This was the complex, highly charged and rapidly changing situation facing a British admiral when he arrived in the Baltic that December.

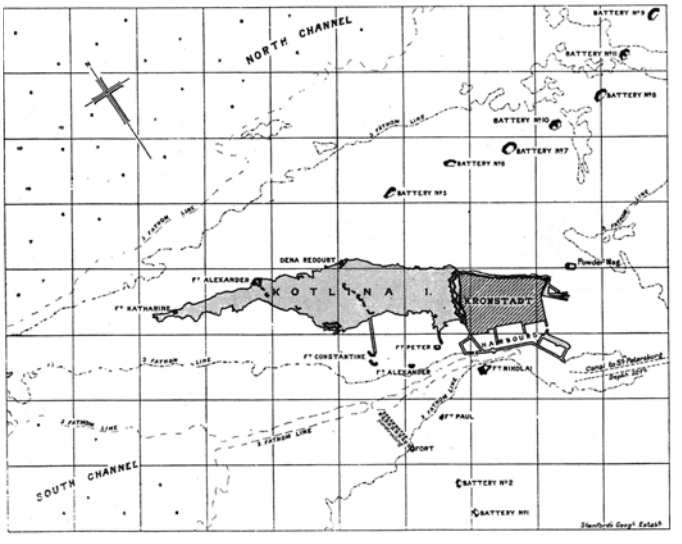
It didn't help that the British government was unable to provide the admiral with clear instructions, as it couldn't agree on a suitable military or diplomatic policy. So, it was left to this British admiral and his Allied force, which included warships from the American and French navies, to forge his own course through these hazardous waters. What evolved was an Allied naval campaign to support the nascent Baltic States, and to protect them from the Soviet fleet. As well as outlining the naval forces facing each other in this Baltic arena, this book outlines what happened during this largely forgotten yet strategically vital naval campaign that helped redraw the map of northern Europe.

BACKGROUND

In the summer of 1914, the Baltic Sea was dominated by the imperial powers of Germany and Russia. Despite its setbacks in the Russo–Japanese War of 1904–05, Russia remained an important military and naval power. The powerful Baltic Fleet safeguarded Russia's interests in the region, and new dreadnoughts and cruisers had replaced the losses it suffered during the Japanese war. On land, Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were all under Russian rule, and Tsar Nicholas II's sprawling Empire stretched from Poland to the Pacific Ocean. Then, on 1 August 1914, Imperial Germany declared war on Russia. Five days later Austria-Hungary did the same. The effectiveness of the Tsar's forces would be put to the test. At first though, the German strategy was to hold off the Russians in the east, while concentrating their might against the Allies in the west.

In August a Russian invasion of East Prussia was repulsed at Tannenberg, but later in the year, the German army went on the offensive in western Poland, to ease the pressure on the flailing Austrian army to the south. In the Baltic the Germans also concentrated their strength in the North Sea, while the Russian fleet rarely left its home ports. The following spring the German offensive resumed, and by August Poland had been overrun, and German troops were at the gates of Riga. By late 1915 the Austro–German front line stretched from Courland on the Baltic to the borders of Romania in the south. During 1916 the Central Powers held this line, while the

The Baltic theatre, from the 1914 edition of *Jane's Fighting Ships*. The main Soviet naval base of Kronstadt lay close to Petrograd (shown here as St Petersburg) at the eastern end of the Gulf of Finland. Other harbours which featured in the campaign are Libau, Riga and Reval, in what is shown here as being in Russian territory.



The naval base of Kronstadt, home of the Soviet Baltic Fleet. It lay at the eastern end of Kotlin Island, 20 miles west of Petrograd. The harbour was surrounded by a ring of sea forts, while coastal batteries protected both the island and the harbour. Taken from the 1914 edition of *Jane's Fighting Ships*.

Russians exhausted their last reserves in a series of doomed offensives.

By early 1917 Imperial Russia was on the verge of collapse. Food shortages, inflation and social unrest all contributed to the crisis, while after five million casualties virtually all support for the war had evaporated. So, in February, the Russian parliament (Duma), based in Petrograd,[1] assumed power, and on 15 March the Tsar abdicated. This though, achieved little, apart from inviting more political unrest as the various factions vied for control of the government. In the Baltic provinces and in Finland, this led to a growing demand for self-determination. For the moment though, the war would continue.

At the time, the Communist or Bolshevik faction in the Duma was in the minority, but Vladimir Lenin's return to Russia strengthened its hand. In the Baltic Fleet, mutinies led to the establishment of pro-revolutionary ships' committees, and in Petrograd the sailors joined the city's Soviet (or governing council), chaired by Leon Trotsky. During 1917 the sailors of the Baltic Fleet became increasingly aligned with the Bolsheviks. It was against this background that the German army finally made its move. On 1 September it launched a fresh offensive aimed at Riga, and the city fell two days later. Before they could use Riga, the Germans first had to capture the islands which formed a barrier at the northern end of the Gulf of Riga. Operation *Albion*, the German amphibious assault on this archipelago, began in mid-October. The Baltic Fleet sailed out to fight its German counterparts, and although defeated, it fought with surprising zeal. Weeks later the same sailors would play a key part in the October Revolution.

On 7 November (25 October in the old Russian calendar) the uprising began, with soldiers and sailors taking control of Petrograd. The following day, shells fired from the cruiser *Aurora* signaled an assault on the Winter Palace, home of the provisional government, which was captured with few casualties. Lenin and his Bolsheviks were now in charge of Russia, which was duly rebranded as the Russian Soviet Republic. One of the revolution's aims was to offer self-determination to the many peoples of Russia. The Finns took advantage of this, and so on 6 December the new Soviet government recognized Finland as an independent nation. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia would have done the same if they hadn't been under German occupation. In January the Ukrainians followed suit, and made peace with Germany, in return for much-needed grain. The old Russian Empire was rapidly falling apart.

At the same time, the Soviet seizure of power plunged Russia into a bloody civil war. While Trotsky raised a Red Army to defend Moscow and Petrograd, an assortment of anti-Soviet factions gathered to oppose it, and

1 In 1914, at the start of World War I, St Petersburg was renamed Petrograd, as the original name sounded too German. Then after the death of Lenin in 1924, the city was renamed Leningrad. In 1991 it reverted to its original name of St Petersburg.

A group of Soviet Orfey-class destroyers alongside a riverside quay in Petrograd. These vessels, together with their similar half-sisters of the Gavriil and Leitenant Illin classes, were the real workhorses of the Soviet Baltic Fleet.

gradually coalesced into a White Army. They were supported by foreign powers, including the United States, Britain, France and Japan, on the proviso that the Whites continue to fight the Germans as well as the Bolsheviks. In the Baltic, the Soviet fleet remained in its ports of Helsingfors (Helsinki) and Kronstadt, although in February 1918 it was grandly renamed the Workers and Peasants Red Fleet. Most simply called it the Soviet Baltic Fleet. The German Navy though, remained in control of most of the Baltic.

In mid-December 1917 an armistice was concluded while peace talks began. The resulting Treaty of Brest–Litovsk, signed on 3 March, brought an end to the war in the east, but for Russia peace came at a hefty price. The Soviets had to abandon the Ukraine, and renounce any claim to Finland, Poland, the Baltic provinces and the oil-rich Caucasus. For the Germans, it meant they could send the bulk of their army to the Western Front, where the reinforcements might tip the military balance. One of the stipulations of the treaty was that the Soviet Baltic Fleet had to cede its forward naval base at Helsingfors to Finland. So, in what was known as the 'Ice Voyage', the fleet's icebreakers cleared a safe path for the fleet through to ice-bound Kronstadt.

By then, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were now firmly under German control, and any glimmerings of nationalism there were suppressed. In Russia neither the Red nor White armies had the strength to oppose what amounted to a German land-grab. Meanwhile in Kronstadt the Soviet Baltic Fleet was rendered equally impotent through a lack of maintenance, while men and guns were stripped from the ships and redeployed on land to fight the advancing Whites. So, by late 1918, Germany was all-dominant in the Baltic. This supremacy though, came to an end on 11 November 1918. The failure of the 1918 offensive in the west led to the collapse of the German

army there, the abdication of the Kaiser and the signing of the Armistice. This dramatically altered the situation in the Baltic. Under the terms of the Armistice the German fleet had to withdraw to its home ports. Overnight, despite its lack of operational warships, the Soviet Baltic Fleet became the dominant naval force in the region.

There was a similar situation on land. According to the terms of the Armistice the German army had to withdraw from all former Russian territory. It did so at its own systematic pace though, leaving behind a Baltic Landwehr, or territorial army, augmented by volunteer Freikorps units. Trotsky's Red Army also took advantage of the political vacuum created by the German withdrawal, and pushed into Estonia. The Armistice also ended the German occupation of the Baltic provinces, and with it the suppression of nationalism. On the day the Armistice was signed an Estonian provisional government was formed, and a week later Latvia proclaimed its independence. The advance of the Red Army though, undermined this move towards self-determination, while pro-Soviet factions emerged to contest full independence. On 14 November the Estonian government appealed to the Western Allies for help.

The Estonian ambassador in London went further, requesting that Britain send a naval force, as well as arms, money and military instructors, to help the Estonians defend themselves against the Soviets. Prime Minister David Lloyd George was amenable to the idea, and agreed to do what he could to help. In the British Admiralty, reports suggested that the Soviet Baltic Fleet was becoming more active following the departure of the German navy. So, a week after the Estonian request, on 21 November 1918, the decision was made to send a small naval force into the Baltic. At the time it had no clear role or mission, while the risks inherent in sending it into heavily mined waters within reach of a still-powerful enemy were self-evident. Still, that afternoon, as the German High Seas Fleet steamed into captivity off the Scottish coast, the orders were issued. Spearheaded by these British warships, the Western Allies – essentially America, Britain and France – would begin their intervention in the Baltic.

A

BRITISH WARSHIPS: DESTROYERS HMS *VENDETTA*, HMS *ABDIEL*

The Royal Navy's fleet in the Baltic was well served by destroyers. The majority of these were modern V&W-class vessels, although during 1919 a number of older destroyers arrived in the Baltic as Britain expanded its naval presence there.

1. HMS *Vendetta*

HMS *Vendetta* was typical of her class. She was launched on the Clyde in September 1917, and was commissioned into service just over a year later. As part of the 13th Destroyer Flotilla, she was one of the first British ships to enter the Baltic. The following month she took part in the capture of the Soviet destroyers *Avtroil* and *Spartak*, before returning to Rosyth in January 1919. Other V&W-class destroyers would be sent out to the Baltic, and they remained the mainstay of R. Adml Cowan's destroyer force throughout the conflict.

2. HMS *Abdiel*

HMS *Abdiel* was a Marksman-class destroyer leader, commissioned in March 1916. She had been converted into a minelayer while still under construction in Merseyside, but in June 1919, when she reached the Baltic, she was serving as the flagship of Capt 'Budge' Curtis, who commanded the 20th Destroyer Flotilla. *Abdiel* was also a minelayer, designed to carry up to 80 mines at a time. That summer, she was used to lay mines in Petrograd Bay at the eastern end of the Gulf of Finland. She was also present off Riga that November when her guns helped repulse an assault on the city by the pro-German Western Russian Volunteer Army.

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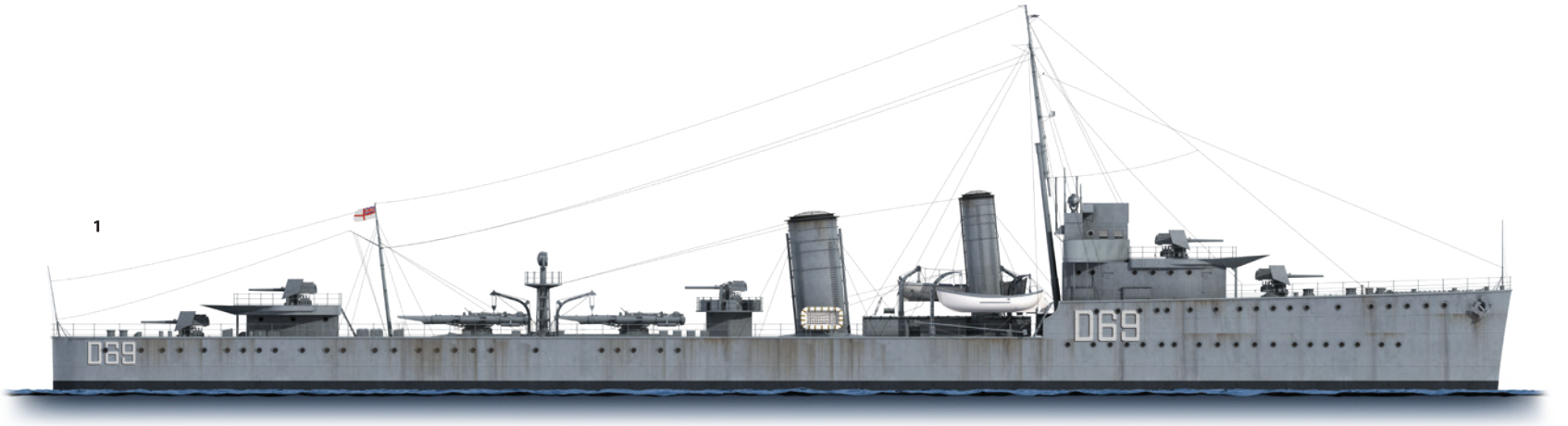

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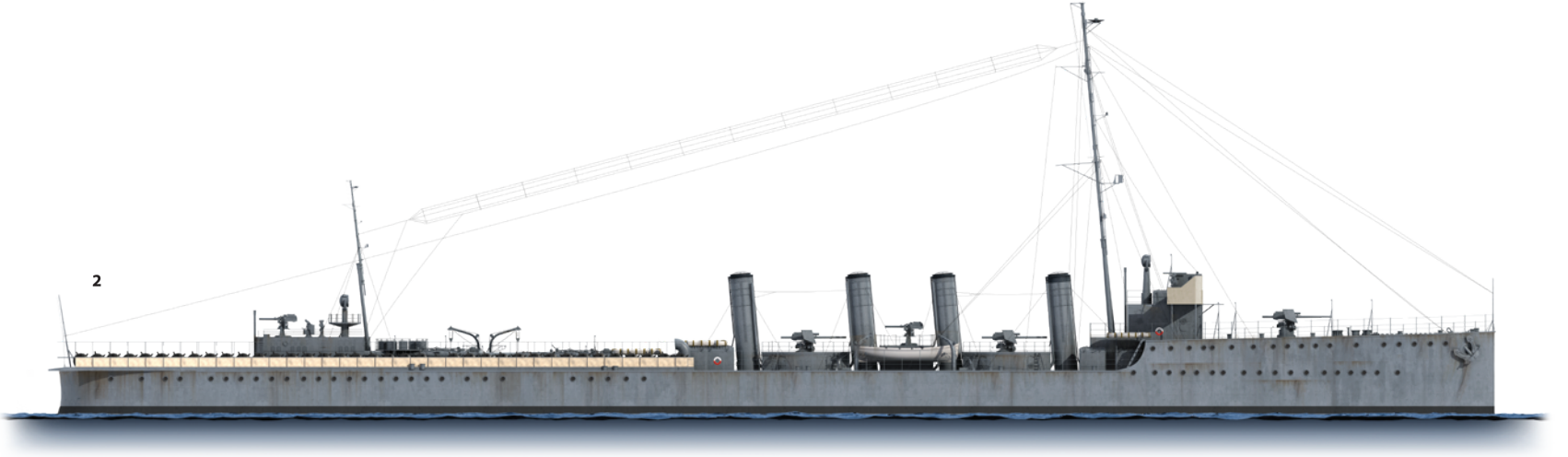


THE CAMPAIGN

On 20 November 1918, a day before the Estonian request, the British War Cabinet met to discuss the Baltic situation. The Prime Minister felt a show of force was needed to strengthen the resolve against the Bolsheviks, and to protect British interests. V. Adml Sir Sidney Robert Fremantle, the Deputy Chief of Naval Staff, suggested sending a cruiser squadron and several destroyers to assess the situation, and to offer arms and support to the Estonians and Latvians if that was deemed appropriate. However, the region was heavily mined, and there was the Soviet Baltic Fleet to consider. Reports suggested it was in poor shape, but it was still a powerful force, and therefore dangerous. Still, the First Sea Lord VAdm Sir Rosslyn Wemyss agreed with Fremantle, and so Lloyd George approved the suggestion. A British naval force would set sail for the Baltic.

British intervention

On 21 November, ten days after the Armistice, the German High Seas Fleet surrendered to the Allies off the Firth of Forth. Leading the German fleet to its internment was the light cruiser *Cardiff*, followed by a host of Allied warships, including the bulk of the British Grand Fleet. It was a heady moment for the fleet, a triumphant victory of seapower. For most of the cheering sailors, they hoped for long-awaited postwar leave, and eventually, for the 'duration-of-hostilities' men, demobilization and a return to civilian life. The 380-strong crew of *Cardiff* though, were to be disappointed. *Cardiff*, the flagship of R. Adml Edwyn Alexander-Sinclair (1865–1945), was given new orders. Alexander-Sinclair and his squadron were bound for the Baltic.

The Admiral's force sailed from Rosyth late on 26 November. His command consisted of his own 6th Light Cruiser Squadron, the 13th Destroyer Flotilla and a small minesweeping flotilla. They reached Copenhagen two days later. The collier *Tregarth*, which was due to meet them there, hadn't arrived, so when Alexander-Sinclair pressed on, he left his coal-burning minesweepers behind, with orders to catch up when they

The light cruiser *Cardiff*, part of the 6th Light Cruiser Squadron, served as the flagship of R. Adml Alexander-Sinclair in late 1919, when the Royal Navy first sent a force of warships to the Baltic. Completed in 1917, the cruiser is typical of the British cruisers deployed there during the campaign.

could. Alexander-Sinclair reached the Livonian port of Libau (now Liepāja) on 1 December. There he learned that the Red Army was approaching the Estonian capital of Reval (modern-day Tallin). So, the following day he continued to the east.

When 5 December broke, the fleet was passing Saaremaa, an island of the Moonsund Archipelago. Then, just before 0100hrs, the cruiser *Cassandra* struck a mine. Her back was broken, and despite every effort Capt Kennedy was forced to abandon ship. All but 11 of her crew were saved before the cruiser sank. The survivors were duly sent home to Britain on board the *Calypso*, which had run aground off Libau, accompanied by *Westminster* and *Verulam*, which had collided with each other. After escorting them back to Copenhagen, Alexander-Sinclair steamed east again, and arrived off Reval on 12 December. The Estonians welcomed the British, and the arms and ammunition they had brought with them in the auxiliary minelayers *Angora* and *Princess Margaret*. This was timely, as the Red Army was now at Rakvere (previously Wesenberg), just 50 miles to the east.

R. Adml Sir Edwyn Alexander-Sinclair (1865–1945) fought at Jutland (1916), and two years later had the honour of leading the German High Seas Fleet into captivity. He led the first British naval force into the Baltic, and was instrumental in establishing cordial relations with the fledgling governments of Estonia and Latvia.

So, at dawn on 14 December *Cardiff* put to sea again, accompanied by *Caradoc* and five destroyers. For over an hour that morning they bombarded the Soviet lines around the small port of Aseri, midway between Reval and Narva. In the process, they demolished a railway bridge east of Aseri, which cut the enemy's supply line. As a result, the offensive ground to a halt. The following day Alexander-Sinclair took *Cardiff*, *Ceres* and five destroyers to Libau and then Riga, to meet the Livonians. From there he would continue to Copenhagen and home. The remainder of his force would remain behind to protect Reval. Apart from a few submarine patrols, the Soviets remained in port.

That, however, was about to change. A small Soviet force, led by Commissar Fyodor Raskolnikov (1892–1939), was assembled, consisting of the battleship *Andrei Pervozvanni*, the cruiser *Oleg* and three destroyers (*Avtroil*, *Azard* and *Spartak*). At noon on 26 December two destroyers arrived off Reval, and began bombarding the city. The senior British naval officer present was Capt Bertram Thesiger of the cruiser *Calypso*, who was attending a lunch hosted by the Estonians. The meal was abandoned, and he led *Calypso* and *Caradoc* out of the harbour, accompanied by the destroyer *Wakeful*. The Soviet destroyers withdrew, and *Wakeful* gave chase. They fired at each other – the first time British and Soviet warships had done so. Suddenly *Spartak* stopped and hoisted a white flag. It turned out she had run over a shoal, and damaged her propellers.

Spartak was towed back into Reval, and Raskolnikov was taken prisoner. The banquet resumed, but afterwards, Thesiger put to sea again. A copy of the Soviet orders had been found on *Spartak*, and Thesiger learned from them that the *Oleg* was in the area. So, *Calypso*, *Caradoc* and three destroyers set off to find her. The cruiser evaded them, but on the morning of 27 December they came upon the destroyer *Avtroil*. She was overhauled after a lengthy chase and a brief exchange of fire. *Avtroil* was duly taken into Reval, where both destroyers were handed over to the Estonians.

The British light cruiser *Caledon*, lying off Libau in February 1919, in another Cecil King painting. At the time, she was the flagship of R. Adml Cowan (1871–1956), whose command flag can be seen at her foremast.

Ice was now forming in the Gulf of Finland, meaning the Soviets would soon be icebound until the spring. Still, Thesiger had time for one more bombardment near Narva before the ice froze solid. Meanwhile Alexander-Sinclair was having problems in Livonia. The German army was abandoning Riga to the advancing Soviets, when *Ceres* put in to Riga. The Latvian government was brought to safety by *Ceres* shortly before the Livonian capital fell on 3 January 1919. Alexander-Sinclair was then ordered home with his remaining ships. On the way, in Copenhagen, he was able to brief his replacement, R. Adml Walter Cowan (1871–1956), who was on his way to Libau with the cruisers *Caledon* and *Royalist*.

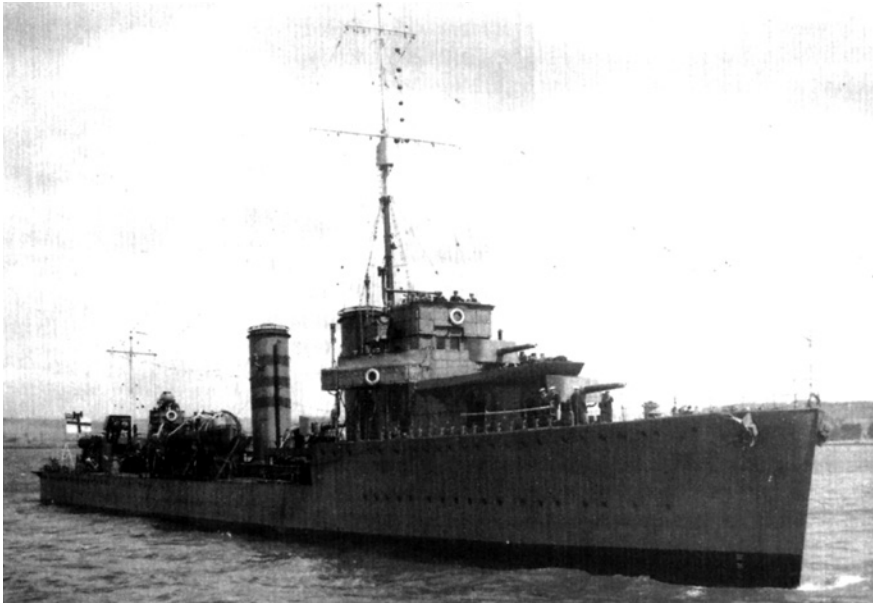
Waiting for the thaw

Cowan was a highly experienced naval commander, with an exemplary war record and a reputation for being a fire-eater. However, even he was perplexed by his orders. As he put it later, 'It was enough to confuse anyone with a claim to sanity! It seemed to me that there never was such a tangle, and my brain reeled with it. An unbeaten German army, two kinds of belligerent Russians, Letts, Finns, Estonians, Lithuanians: ice, mines – 60,000 of them! Russian submarines, German small craft, Russian battleships, cruisers and destroyers, all only waiting for the ice to melt to ravage the Baltic.' It was a perfect summary of the situation.

On 17 January when Cowan reached Libau, he found the occupying Germans and the Livonians at odds with each other. The Germans had even dumped 500 British weapons earmarked for the Livonians into the sea. He learned that the Soviets had reached Windau (now Ventspils) to the north, so he steamed there and bombarded the port. The Soviet troops fled, allowing the Livonians to recapture the place. Leaving Capt John Cameron of *Phaeton* in charge of Libau, Cowan briefly returned to London to discuss the situation. He got no clear instructions, so he returned to the Baltic, where the German commander in Livonia, Maj Gen Gustav Rüdiger von der Goltz, was becoming increasingly obstructive. Still, on 19 April Capt Jean-Joseph Brisson (1868–1957) arrived with a small French squadron. Cowan was now in charge of a truly Allied force. However, for political reasons, the French were unwilling to fight the Soviets.

An armed British sailor, standing guard on the quarterdeck of a V&W-class destroyer while in Libau. This was often necessary in Latvian ports, as the German troops there were considered a threat, and likely to either attempt to capture or to attack Allied ships there.

Leaving Brisson in command in the western Baltic, supported by *Royalist*, *Danae* and *Dauntless*, Cowan headed north to Reval. As the ice in the



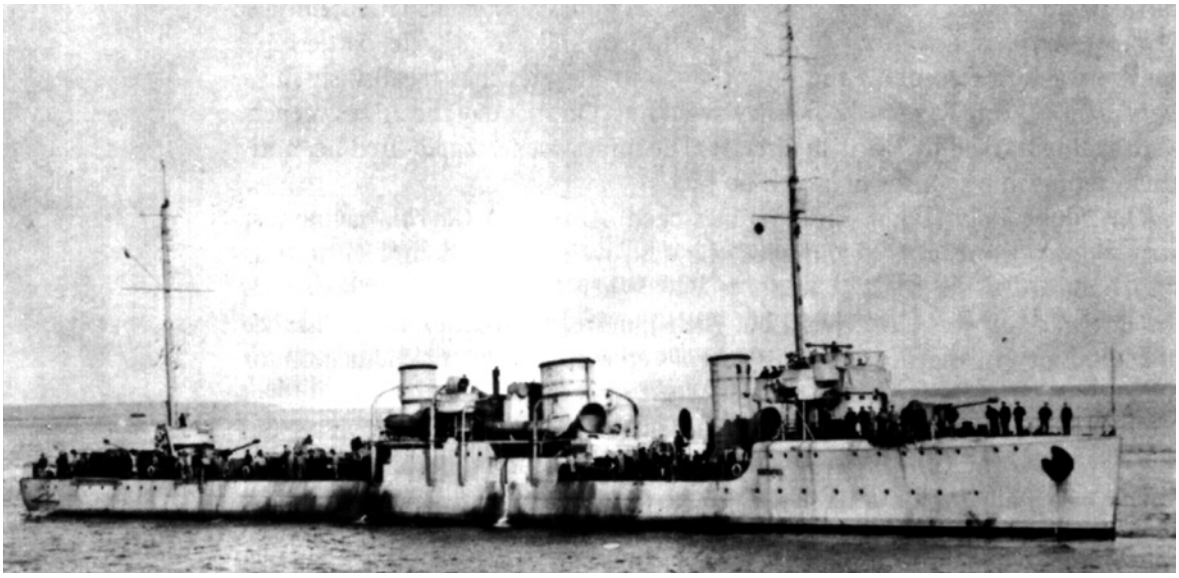
In the summer of 1919, part of the 3rd Destroyer Flotilla was sent to the Baltic. Its flagship was *Campbell*, a Scott-class flotilla leader. Like the other flotilla leaders in the Baltic, she was larger and better-armed than the other British destroyers, carrying four 4.7in guns and six 21in torpedo tubes.

Gulf of Finland was starting to melt, he expected the Soviet fleet would return to the fight. Sure enough, on 15 March the Soviets formed an 'Active Detachment' made up of its operational warships – a dreadnought, a pre-dreadnought, a cruiser, several destroyers and submarines. Cowan arrived in Reval on 23 April with just his flagship *Caledon* and four destroyers. This meant he was seriously outnumbered by Commissar Nikolai Kuzmin's Active Detachment, if it put to sea. Reinforcements trickled in, with *Curacao* and *Cleopatra* arriving. *Curacao*, however, was damaged by a mine off Helsingfors, and had to return home with *Caledon*. Cowan then flew his flag in *Cleopatra*.

On land, the situation was confused. In the Russian province of Ingermanland, Gen Laidoner's Estonian army was pushing back Gen Vacietis's 7th Red Army. However, Gen Rodzianko commanding the Whites' North-West Army, refused to recognize or cooperate with the Estonians. Meanwhile in June, after the Germans moved against the Estonians, they were defeated by a joint Estonian and Latvian force near Cēsis to the north-east of Riga. The Germans withdrew to regroup, and would resume their offensive in Latvia in the autumn. Cowan expected the Soviet Baltic Fleet to come out from behind its protective minefields to support its hard-pressed army, which was then around Narva. So, on 13 May, Cowan established a temporary forward base at Seiskari Island, in the middle of the Gulf. From there he could react quickly to any Soviet sortie.

Sparring in the Gulf

Kuzmin made his first move on 17 May – a probe to the south of the minefields into Koporye Bay off the Ingermanland coast. The destroyer *Gavriil* and four minesweepers, were spotted by Cowan from *Cleopatra*, who was accompanied by *Shakespeare*, *Scout* and *Walker*. Cdr Sevastyanov of the *Gavriil* withdrew after the smaller minesweepers reached safety. A week later Cowan was reinforced by the six boats of Capt Martin Dunbar-Naismith's 6th Submarine Flotilla. After it established its base in Reval, the squadron



During the campaign the Soviet destroyer *Gavriil* was one of the most active warships in the Baltic Fleet. She fought several skirmishes with Cowan's fleet during the summer of 1919, but was lost after she struck a mine on 21 October.

would begin patrols to the north and south of the Soviet minefields, which spanned the Gulf from Stirs Point on the Finnish coast to Karavelda Point on Ingermanland, just to the east of Koporye Bay.

On 29 May, the submarine *L-16* spotted the destroyer *Azard* and five minesweepers probe Koporye Bay, then retire. Two days later the Soviets returned, but this time they encountered Cowan with the bulk of his fleet: three cruisers (*Cleopatra*, *Dragon* and *Galatea*) and seven destroyers (*Walker*, *Wallace*, *Voyager*, *Vanessa*, *Wryneck*, *Versatile* and *Vivacious*). The Soviets turned away after *Walker* opened fire at long range. Their withdrawal was covered by the *Petropavlovsk*, whose 12in shells fell dangerously close to *Walker*, prompting Cowan to break off the pursuit. It was clear that Kuzmin was willing to contest Cowan's control of the bay. So, Cowan needed a base closer to the minefields than Reval.

While Seiskari Island was useful, it was open to attack. So, in late May, a British diplomatic mission to Finland negotiated the use of the Björkö

B

CLASH BETWEEN BRITISH AND GERMAN DESTROYERS, 4 JUNE 1919

During the summer of 1919, R. Adml Cowan established a forward base at Björkö Sound on the Finnish coast, in an attempt to bottle the Soviet Baltic Fleet into the eastern end of the Gulf of Finland. The Soviets though, had other plans, and frequently skirmished with Cowan's blockading forces. Many of these took place in Koporye Bay at the southern side of the Gulf, just beyond the Russian minefields. Late in the afternoon of Wednesday 4 June the Soviet Orfey-class destroyers *Gavriil* and *Azard* passed through a gap in the minefield to make a sweep into the bay. There they encountered the British V&W-class destroyers *Versatile*, *Vivacious* and *Walker*. The Soviet destroyers promptly turned about and headed back to safety. On the way the British submarine *L-55* launched two torpedoes at *Gavriil*, which missed, but the boat accidentally surfaced and was fired on before she was able to submerge again. A short while later, she ran into a mine and was lost with all hands. Meanwhile, the British destroyers altered course to close the range, and opened fire. *Azard* and *Gavriil* promptly fired back with their after guns and the running battle continued until 18.00hrs, when the Soviet destroyers passed through the gap in their minefield. By this stage the range was down to just four miles, and the British shells were falling around the Soviet destroyers. Amazingly, neither of them was hit. Moments later the British realized their opponents had reached safety and gave up the chase. This shows *Azard* (left) and *Gavriil* retiring towards the gap in their own protective minefield.

Cdr Sevastyanov, the young commander of the Soviet destroyer *Gavriil*, pictured in 1915, while wearing his Tsarist uniform. He handled his ship with great skill during the sorties of May and June 1919, and again in August when his gunfire sank two British CMBs. He died when the destroyer struck a mine in October, and sank with the loss of all but 19 of her crew.

archipelago (now the Russian Beryozovye Islands) as a temporary Allied base. The islands lay off the Finnish coast south of Vyborg, close to the northern end of the Soviet minefield. This forward base, known to the British as Björkö Sound, was established on 5 June. Cowan's position was also strengthened in late May when Cdre Alexander Duff (1874–1952) arrived. Duff would now assume command in the western Baltic, leaving Cowan free to deal with the Soviets.

Early on 1 June, the same Soviet force repeated its probe into the bay. This time only *Walker* was on patrol there, as Cowan's other ships were grouped off Seiskari Island, waiting for the Soviets to make their move. *Walker* was the bait, and when the *Azard* engaged her at a range of five miles Cowan's other destroyers arrived from the north, hoping to cut off *Azard*'s escape route. The Soviet destroyer and accompanying minesweepers withdrew, covered by *Petropavlovsk*'s guns. In the fight, *Walker* was hit twice by *Petropavlovsk*'s 12in shells, but surprisingly, these caused only minor damage. The Soviet force was then attacked by three Estonian aircraft, the bombs of which damaged the minesweeper *Zapal*.

The following day *Vivacious* and *Voyager* traded salvoes with *Azard* and *Gavriil* across the minefield. Then, on 4 June the two Soviet destroyers sortied into Koporye Bay. *Versatile*, *Vivacious* and *Walker* intercepted them, and they turned back. As they did, they passed the submarine *L-55*, which fired two torpedoes at *Azard*. They missed, but buoyancy problems caused the boat to break surface. She was fired on by *Azard*, but submerged again. Moments later the boat ran into a mine – and sank with all hands.[2]

By that time, Cowan was based off Björkö, which was an enclosed anchorage which Cowan described as not unlike Scapa Flow, only with trees. A lookout post was established at Stirs Light, overlooking the approaches, while the destroyers *Versatile*, *Vivacious* and *Walrus* were anchored at the entrance to the sound, with steam up, in case of a Soviet attack. Sure enough, late on 9 June *Azard* and *Gavriil* approached and exchanged salvoes with the guardships before withdrawing. Cowan responded by requesting that minelayers be sent out, to sow a protective minefield across the entrance. Still, Cowan had a defensible forward base, and intended to use it to harass the enemy. Then, when the 40ft coastal motor boats *CMB-4* and *CMB-7* arrived at Björkö, Cowan was handed a new weapon. Lt Augustus Agar of *CMB-4,* who commanded the two craft, had orders to provide a ferry service for secret agents to the Finnish border close to Petrograd. Cowan, however, planned to use him more offensively.

Agar established a base at Terrioki (now Zelenogorsk in Russia), a Finnish fishing village just 25 miles from Petrograd. Cowan realized Agar's boats could safely pass through the Soviet minefields. So, by arming them with

2 In 1928 *L-55* was subsequently raised, rebuilt and brought into service in the Soviet Navy, and the bodies of her crew were repatriated. *L-55* played an interesting part in the development of the Soviet Navy. See Budzbon, Przemysław and Radziemski, 'The Beginnings of Soviet Naval Power', in *Warship 2020* (Osprey Publishing, 2020)

torpedoes, he now had craft that could attack the enemy in their own protected waters. Then, on 13 June, the Soviet garrison of the Krasnaya Gorka (Grey Horse) fort revolted. It lay on the Ingermanland coast, and protected the seaward approaches to Kronstadt. On 15 June, Zelenoy ordered *Petropavlovsk* and *Andrei Pervozvanni* to bombard the rebel fort. This in turn gave Agar an opportunity. That evening the two CMBs headed south from Terrioki to attack the batteships, but the operation had to be called off when *CMB-7* was damaged by floating debris. The following night Agar tried again, this time in *CMB-4*.

The men who torpedoed and sank the *Oleg*. Lt Augustus Agar, who commanded *CMB-4*, is in the centre, with SLt John Hampsheir on his right and Chief Motor Mechanic Hugh Beeley on his left. Afterwards, Agar was awarded a Victoria Cross, Hampsheir a Distinguished Service Cross and Beeley a Conspicuous Gallantry Medal.

By then the battleships had returned to Kronstadt, and had been replaced by the cruiser *Oleg*, protected by a destroyer screen. A little after midnight *CMB-4* slipped past the Soviet destroyers, and launched her torpedo. She then sped off to the west, pursued by Soviet gunfire. The torpedo struck *Oleg*, and the cruiser capsized and sank in shallow water. Later, Agar was awarded a Victoria Cross for his actions. The sinking, however, came too late to save the fort, which had already surrendered to the Soviets. Despite being briefly captured by the Estonians, the fort was retaken by the Soviets, who held it for the remainder of the campaign.

In early July the aircraft carrier *Vindictive* arrived, carrying a mixed bag of 12 aircraft (Sopwith Camels and Sopwith 1½ Strutter fighters, and Grain Griffin and Short 184 seaplanes), under the command of Maj David Donald of the RAF. An airfield was created at Koivisto near Björkö, where these could operate from, but until it was completed, *Vindictive* would serve as their base. On 30 July two attacks on Kronstadt were launched from her, in waves of nine and three aircraft. No damage was done, and the airmen noted that the Soviet base was well protected by anti-aircraft guns. That day, Capt Berwick Curtis (1876–1965) arrived in *Abdiel*, together with the five other destroyers of his 20th Flotilla. These had been converted to minelayers, and so Cowan had them improve the Björkö defences. Curtis's ships had also towed other reinforcements astern of them. These were the seven 55ft CMBs commanded by Cdr Claude Dobson. Cowan planned to put these boats to good use.

Operation *RK*

For much of July and early August, Cowan's ships regularly sortied from Björkö to bombard the Red Army in Ingermanland. They also patrolled Koporye Bay and the waters off Seiskari Island. However, the Soviet fleet remained behind its defensive belt of minefields, apart from the occasional submarine patrol beyond them. Newly arrived minesweepers were used to clear 'The Red Track' between Copenhagen and Reval, and on to Björkö. Two of these boats, *Gentian* and *Myrtle* were lost to mines off the Moonsund Archipelago on 16 July. So, as the Soviets proved unwilling to come to him,

The 55ft CMBs used in the Kronstadt raid were capable of making between 35 and 40kts, depending on which engines were fitted in them. Designed by the power boat manufacturer John Thornycroft, their hulls were designed to plane through the water when at high speed, to reduce drag.

Cowan decided to take the fight to the enemy. Since the Koivisto airfield had opened, *Vindictive* was used to ferry more aircraft out from Copenhagen, and then served as a depot ship for Dobson's CMBs. It was on board her then that Operation *RK* was planned – a motor boat attack on Kronstadt.

The attack was planned for the night of 15 August, but heavy rain led to a postponement. So, late on 17 August Dobson's seven CMBs left Björkö, and were guided through the minefields by Agar in *CMB-4*. Kronstadt lay on Kotlin Island, which was ringed by sea forts and other defences. However, Agar knew these waters, and led Dobson's boats in a clockwise course around the island. Agar then held off, waiting to escort them back to safety. Dobson lost a boat to mechanical failure as they neared Kronstadt, so the attack was carried out by six boats, in two waves of three.

It was just after 0130hrs on 18 August when Dobson led the first towards the harbour entrance from the south-east. The first wave was made up of *CMB-79* (Lt Bremner), *CMB-31* (Cdr Dobson) and *CMB-88* (Lt Dayrell-Reed). All but Bremner's boat carried two torpedoes. The entrance was guarded by the destroyer *Gavriil*, but the three boats sped past her to reach the narrow harbour entrance. Ahead of Bremner was the submarine depot ship *Pamyat Azova*. He launched his torpedo and hit her amidships. *Pamyat Azova* quickly capsized at her moorings.

The defenders were awake by then, and heavy fire greeted Dobson and Dayrell-Reed as they headed left towards the battleship berths. Dobson launched CMB-31's two torpedoes at *Andrei Pervozvanni*, then turned away. One of the torpedoes struck the battleship's bow, and she began flooding. Meanwhile Dayrell-Reed had been hit, and so his second, Lt Steele, launched his torpedoes at *Petropavlovsk*, but these hit the sea wall. Their job done, all three boats then sped back towards the harbour entrance.

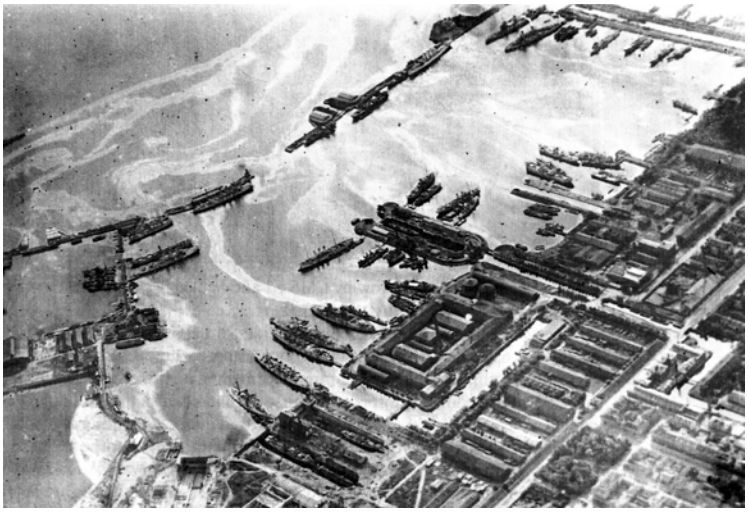
At that point the second wave arrived. It was made up of *CMB-72* (SLt Bodley), *CMB-62* (Lt Cdr Brade) and *CMB-24* (Lt Napier). Just as she passed through the harbour entrance Bodley's boat was hit by fire, and her torpedo release mechanism was smashed. So, he circled to starboard, then headed back out of the harbour. Behind her, Brade roared into the harbour,

The V&W-class destroyer *Wolsey*, pictured off Libau in early 1919, again by Cecil King. This class of destroyers formed the backbone of the British Baltic fleet during this period.

only to ram Bremner's *CMB-79*, which at that moment was coming out of the harbour entrance. *CMB-79* began to sink, so Brade slowed to pick up survivors. Napier's task was to sink the guardship. Unfortunately, his torpedo missed, and *Gavriil* opened fire. Then a direct hit blew *CMB-24* apart. So Brade, after rescuing Bremner and his crew, launched his torpedoes at the guardship, which both missed. *CMB-62* was raked by fire and she sank just outside the harbour entrance. Her surviving crew were rescued and captured.

This action allowed *CMB-31* and *CMB-88* to reach the open sea. Their escape was covered by Agar in *CMB-4*, who launched a torpedo into the harbour, to deter pursuit. On the way out, the broken-down *CMB-86* was located and towed back to Björkö. Two of the other boats were badly shot up, but, amazingly, Cdr Dobson's boat emerged largely unscathed. The whole raid was over by 0200hrs. Three CMBs had been sunk in the attack, and two damaged. Ten men had been killed, including Brade who had led the second wave, and Dayrell-Reed, whose body was still on board

The main entrance to Kronstadt harbour, shortly before the start of World War I. It was here that the British CMBs raced into the harbour early on 18 August 1919, and where, minutes later, three of the boats were sunk.



An aerial view of Kronstadt naval base, taken in mid-August 1919, days before this fortified harbour was attacked by Cdr Dobson's flotilla of CMBs. The dreadnought *Petropavlovsk* and the pre-dreadnought battleship *Andrei Pervozvanni* can be seen in the top right-hand corner. They were moored in the same position in the early hours of 18 August.

CMB-88 – he was buried near Koivisto. In exchange the capsized *Pamyat' Azova* was sunk, and the *Andrei Pervozvanni* was badly damaged. The battleship would remain out of action for the rest of the campaign. The *Petropavlosk*, however, had not been hit, nor had the port's dry dock, which had been Brade's target. In effect, the Soviet Baltic Fleet had got off lightly.

The raid's real achievement though was its effect on morale. It led to a significant demoralization of the Soviet Baltic Fleet. After the raid, with the notable exception of its submarines, the fleet's warships rarely left Kronstadt. The raid effectively ended the threat posed to the Allied fleet in the eastern Baltic. As Cowan himself put it, 'After this nothing bigger than a destroyer moved again.' Even the submarines had their offensive abilities reduced, as much of their spares and warheads were lost when the *Pamyat' Azova* sank. That said, the fleet's boats were about to score their biggest success of the campaign. The British Admiralty was delighted. This was just the kind of venture which cast the Royal Navy in a good light. Eventually, both Cdr Dobson and Lt Steele would be awarded a Victoria Cross in recognition of their achievements.

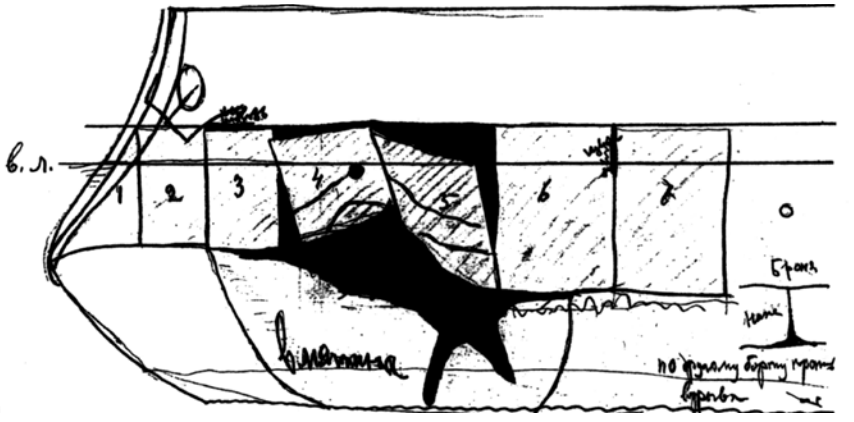
After Kronstadt

After the raid, Cowan continued to lay minefields to deter any more Soviet sorties. His ships continued to come under occasional fire from the Krasnaya Gorka fort, so he asked the Admiralty for a monitor, so he could subdue it. Meanwhile the work of blockading the Soviet fleet continued, while Agar also kept up his clandestine trips to Terrioki, ferrying agents in and out of Russia. Then, on 31 August, the Soviets struck back. The minelaying destroyers *Abdiel* and *Vittoria* were at anchor off Siskoi Island. Shortly

C

BRITISH MOTOR TORPEDO BOATS ATTACKING KRONSTADT, 18 AUGUST 1919

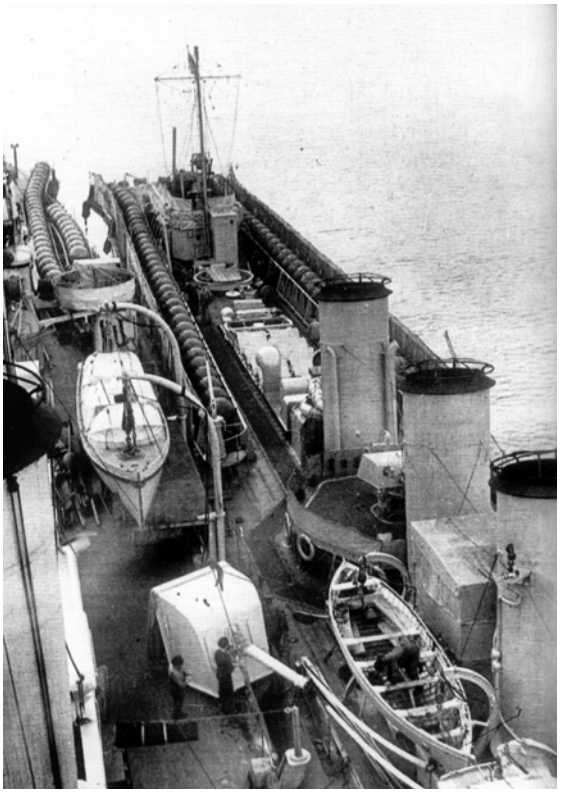
On the evening of Sunday 17 August 1919, a force of eight coastal motor boats (CMBs) set out from Björkö Sound and headed towards Kronstadt, the heavily defended base of the Soviet Baltic Fleet. One of the boats broke down, and another (*CMB-4*), captained by Lt Cdr Agar, was there purely to guide the other boats in. The approach of the six remaining boats was covered by a small RAF bombing raid, but as they neared their objective, they were split up into two groups of three craft. The attack, led by Cdr Dobson in *CMB-31*, began shortly after 01.30hrs. The first three boats swept through the harbour entrance, and while one boat torpedoed the old cruiser *Pamyat Azova*, the other two headed towards the battleship berth. Although the harbour was swept by Soviet fire, Dobson ordered the boat's commander Lt Macbean to head for the nearest battleship, the pre-dreadnought *Andrei Pervozvanni*, which was moored in front of the dreadnought *Petropavlovsk*. As soon as the two torpedoes were launched, Macbean spun the boat around and headed out of the harbour which allowed the second boat, *CMB-88*, to try its luck. As they swept away, the three-man crew of *CMB-31* saw one of their torpedoes strike the bow of their target. They made it safely out of the harbour, but three of the six boats were lost in the attack. The *Andrei Pervozvanni* was badly damaged and took no further part in the campaign. Later, Dobson was awarded the Victoria Cross for his actions.



This sketch shows the damage inflicted on the pre-dreadnought battleship *Andrei Pervozvanni* during the raid of 18 August 1919. The torpedo launched from *CMB-31* tore a large hole in her port bow, causing extensive flooding. The battleship was towed into the Kronstadt dry dock, but she was never fully repaired, and was eventually scrapped.

after 2120hrs, *Vittoria* was struck by two torpedoes fired from the Soviet submarine *Pantera*. She sank in five minutes, but thankfully *Abdiel* was able to rescue all but eight of her crew. It was the greatest Soviet achievement of the campaign, and *Vittoria* remains the largest warship ever sunk by a Soviet submarine.

This was effectively the last hostile act between the two fleets. Despite this, lives were still lost. On 4 September, the freshly arrived destroyer *Verulam* strayed into the British minefield off Stirs Point, and a mine detonated and sank her, with the loss of 28 men. Maj Donald's aircraft also kept up their pinprick raids on Kronstadt. Although these achieved little, they helped to underpin the moral superiority Cowan had attained over his Soviet rival. Still, Adm Zelenoy would attempt one last sortie that October. Earlier that month, his ships and naval landing parties had helped repel a White drive on Petrograd.



The deck of the British flotilla leader *Abdiel*, in 1918, while conducting minelaying operations in the North Sea. Under the command of Capt Berwick Curtis, the destroyer would perform a similar role off Björkö.

Meanwhile, the Soviet garrison of Krasnaya Gorka fort was cut off, and under attack from the Estonians, supported by the guns of Cowan's cruisers. So, early on 21 October, Zelenoy's four modern destroyers entered Koporye Bay on a minelaying expedition, to entrap the British cruisers. Instead, they ran into a British minefield, and *Gavriil*, *Konstantin* and *Svoboda* were all lost. Only 25 crewmen survived to be rescued by the fourth destroyer, the *Azard*.

Two days later, the powerful monitor *Erebus* arrived off Björkö. She had come at Cowan's request, after serving off Archangel. Four days later, protected by a destroyer screen, she was in action, bombarding the Krasnaya Gorka fort. She continued her sporadic bombardment for three days, with her fire directed from a circling aircraft. Unfortunately, on 31 October the plane was shot down from a Soviet observation balloon, by a very lucky pistol shot. The damage to the fort was slight as the monitor was short of ammunition, having expended most of her shells in northern Russia.

The arrival of the monitor *Erebus* in the Baltic in late October gave Cowan the heavy firepower he needed to bombard the Soviet fort of Krasnaya Gorka. The fort's guns guarded the seaward approaches to Kronstadt, and protected the flank of the 7th Red Army.

So she was sent back to Libau, where she would be resupplied. Meanwhile, the Estonian attack stalled.

By then though, it was clear that the chances of any more Soviet sorties were slim. So, Cowan began sending his ships to join Cdre Duff in the western Baltic, where the Germans were on the offensive again. In Latvia, Maj Gen von der Goltz had been reinforced by former Russian POWs, who were formed into a new Russo–German force under the command of an adventurer, Pavel Bermondt who styled himself Prince Avalov. In early October, Bermondt's troops moved on Riga, and by the middle of the month they were on the verge of capturing the city. Then they began firing on Allied ships lying off the port. As a result, Cowan gave Cdre Jean-Joseph Brisson, who was in charge of them, permission to use force. So, on 3 November, when the Livonians counter-attacked, British and French warships fired in support. As a result, Bermondt's Russo–German troops were driven back, and Riga was saved.

The final drama of the campaign would take place at Libau. In early November, Bermondt's troops surrounded Libau. The Latvian garrison called on the Allies to support them, and so the ships fired their guns in support of the defenders. On 7 November *Erebus* arrived, and replenished her ammunition. Then, on 14 November, when Bermondt launched an all-out assault, her 15in guns were used to deadly effect. The Russo–German troops suffered heavy losses, and retreated. This failed assault marked the end of German attempts to gain control of the Baltic States. At the same time, the White North-West army, which had almost reached the gates of Petrograd, fell apart through losses and desertion. Its survivors were interned by the Estonians.

The submarine depot ship *Pamyat Azova* seen a few days after the raid on Kronstadt by Cdr Dobson's torpedo-armed motor boats. The old cruiser was torpedoed and sunk by *CMB-79* in the shallow water of the harbour. Afterwards, she was raised, only to be scrapped.

R. Adml Alexander Zelenoy (1872–1922), who commanded the Soviet Baltic Fleet during the campaign, had served in the Russian Imperial Navy during World War I, where he specialized in mine warfare. Although a skilled and experienced commander, he was hampered during the 1919 campaign by political interference and by chronic shortages of fuel, parts and men.

The Soviets though, were war weary, and after an armistice was agreed, peace talks were begun. These led to the Soviet recognition of the independent Baltic States on 2 February 1920.

THE SOVIET BALTIC FLEET

In theory, the Russian Baltic Fleet was a powerful force, consisting of everything from modern dreadnoughts to gunboats and support vessels. It had played its part in World War I, despite being outnumbered and outclassed by the German High Seas Fleet. Its warships had protected Russian waters, and they did what they could to oppose German advances on land along the Baltic coast. In this it was fortunate that for most of the war the German fleet was based in Germany's North Sea ports, where it faced the British Grand Fleet. It was 1917 before the Germans made any serious naval incursion into the eastern Baltic, in support of the army's drive on Riga. The great port fell in September 1917, and the Russian squadrons based there were withdrawn to Reval. The following month, in support of their invasion of the islands at the entrance to the Gulf of Riga, the two navies clashed in Moon Sound.

The Russians were defeated and broke off the action following the loss of the pre-dreadnought battleship *Slava* and a destroyer. The following February, in accordance with the treaty being negotiated in Brest–Litovsk, the fleet was withdrawn again, first to Helsinki in Finland, and then in April to its safer base of Kronstadt, which protected the seaward approaches to Petrograd. From then, until the Armistice of November 1918, the Soviet Baltic Fleet never seriously ventured far from its base. Meanwhile, as Trotsky's Red Guards were evolving into the Red Army, sailors from the Baltic and Black Sea fleets were called on to serve ashore, fighting alongside their army

Kronstadt Naval Force

4 dreadnought battleships: *Gangut*, *Petropavlovsk*, *Poltava*, *Sevastopol*

3 pre-dreadnought battleships*: Andrei Pervozvanni*, *Grazhdanin* (formerly *Tsesarevich*), *Respublika* (formerly *Imperator Pavel I*)

3 armoured cruisers: *Gromboi*, *Rossiya*, *Rurik*

3 light cruisers: *Aurora*, *Diana*, *Oleg*

10 destroyers in 2 squadrons, 8 minelayers (including 1 auxiliary), 6 submarines, in 1 flotilla, supported by 2 submarine tenders. In addition, there was a minesweeper detachment of 6 minesweepers, supported by 4 converted torpedo boats, and an auxiliary detachment of 5 patrol boats, 5 icebreakers and 2 tugs.

Of these, *Aurora*, *Diana*, *Grazhdanin*, *Gromboi* and *Rossiya* formed a reserve detachment, as they were undergoing refits or repairs. Manpower shortages meant that few of these ships were ready for immediate service, as many lacked half of their crew.

Petrograd Naval Force

2 armoured cruisers: *Admiral Makarov*, *Bayan*

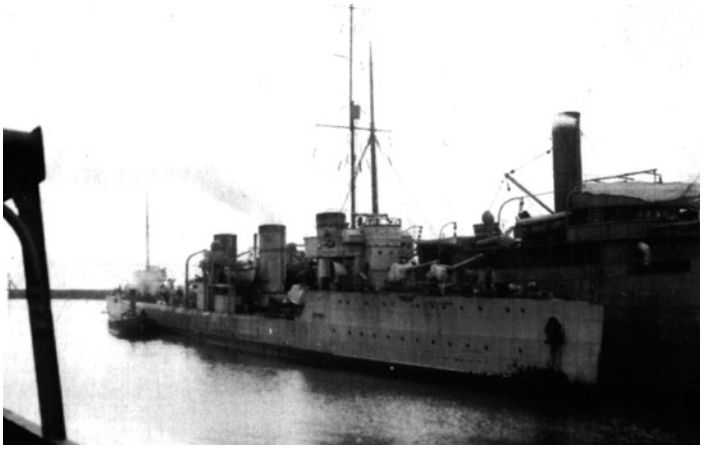
1 light cruiser: *Bogatyr*

In addition, it boasted a total of 59 destroyers

16 destroyers in two squadrons, plus 13 old destroyers in a reserve squadron, 13 old submarines in a reserve flotilla, 1 minelayer and 1 minesweeper.

comrades. This inevitably led to a stripping of some of the best crews from the fleet at Kronstadt. In some cases, guns were dismounted and adapted for use on land. Maintenance too became an increasing problem, as the limited industrial capacity of the Russian Soviet Republic was being used to support the army, rather than the less-active fleet.

So, in November 1918, despite its impressive strength on paper, the fleet was a much-reduced force. At the time it consisted of a Kronstadt Naval Force, which in theory was under the control of the 7th Red Army, and a Petrograd Naval Force, tasked with protecting the city, controlled by the Petrograd Soviet.

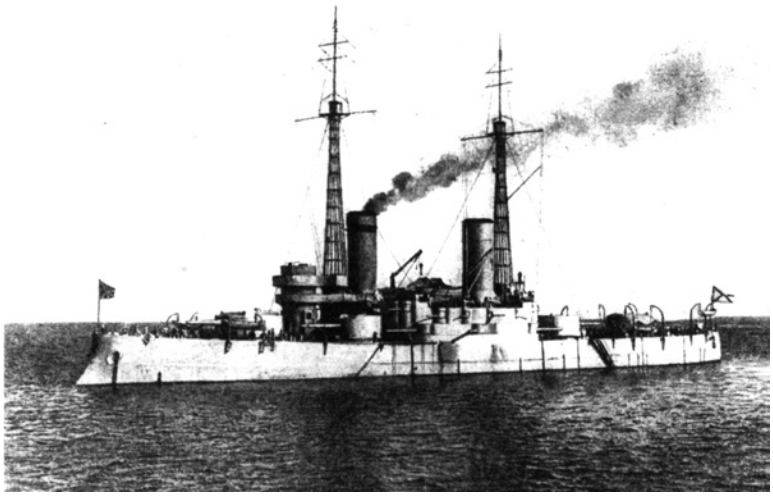


The Soviet destroyer *Kapitan I Ranga Miklucha-Maklai* was renamed *Spartak* on 18 December 1918. Eight days later, she was captured by British cruisers and destroyers and brought into Reval. This shows her the next day, in the Estonian port. Shortly afterwards, she was handed over to the Estonian Navy, which renamed her *Vambola*.

However, this was a fleet in name only. In addition to its maintenance and crewing problems, the fleet suffered from a chronic lack of fuel. This was less of a problem for the old coal-burning ships, as coal stocks were still relatively plentiful. It was fuel oil that was in short supply, as the Whites and Georgian nationalists controlled access to Russian refineries and oil fields in the Caucasus. Effectively, by the time the first Allied ships arrived in the Baltic, this once-proud fleet had been reduced to a small naval group centred around the dreadnought *Petropavlovsk*, the pre-dreadnought *Andrei Pervozvanni,* and the cruiser *Oleg*. These ships were supported by a number of active destroyers, submarines and minesweepers.

When the Allies first arrived in the Baltic that December they were aware of the reduced effectiveness of the Soviet Baltic Fleet. They were also aware that these ships lacked the order and efficiency of the pre-revolutionary Baltic Fleet, as most of its officers had either been killed or relieved of their duties. They also considered that ships run by commissars and committees would be less effective than those run on more traditional naval lines. What the Allies failed to understand was that a number of quite junior Russian officers and petty officers had now been raised to command, and while they might have lacked the training and skill of their Imperial Naval predecessors, they often made up for this in zeal. There was also the possibility that, during the winter, when Kronstadt was iced in, the Russian Soviet Republic might reverse its policy to neglect the fleet, and instead use its resources to restore the fleet to its full fighting potential.

Allied doubts about the efficiency of the fleet's leadership appeared to have been vindicated on 26 December 1918 when Raskolnikov was taken prisoner aboard the Soviet destroyer *Spartak*. Despite his lack of naval experience, the former Tsarist midshipman had become a member of the *Revvoeyensovet* (Revolutionary War Soviet) of the Soviet Baltic Fleet, and then the fleet commissar. In this capacity he was given an active command in December 1918. His subsequent naval attack on the Estonian capital of Reval was attempted without effective planning. As a result, it led to the needless loss of two Soviet destroyers, the *Avtroil* and the *Spartak*, and Raskolnikov's capture. However, as a commissar, he was not usually required to assume command of an operation.



When the battleship *Andrei Pervozvanni* entered service in 1911 she was already out of date, thanks to the development of the dreadnought. However, this pre-dreadnought battleship was still a useful asset to the Soviets in 1918–19, as she still outgunned all of the Allied warships in the Baltic.

That task, in theory, fell to a far more experienced officer, R. Adml Alexander Zelenoy (1872–1922). He had served in the Imperial Russian Navy, and during the war had been in charge of the fleet's mine warfare units. As the post-revolutionary fleet's Chief of Staff, it was Capt Zelenoy who assisted the fleet commander, Capt Alexei Schastni, during the Ice Voyage. After Schastni was executed on Trotsky's orders in March 1918, the job of fleet commander fell to Capt Sergei Zarubayev. He was replaced by Zelenoy on 18 January 1919, after the loss of *Avtroil* and *Spartak*. So, when the ice melted in April 1919, it was Zelenoy who commanded the Soviet Baltic Fleet, a position he retained throughout the campaign. He finally stood down in July 1920, when he was replaced by Raskolnikov, after the former commissar's release as a prisoner of war.

On 15 March, on Zelenoy's orders, an Active Detachment had been formed, under the direct command of Commissar Nikolai Kuzmin (1883–1938). He had replaced Raskolnikov as the fleet's commissar, and held the post for the remainder of the campaign. In theory, his force was centred around three battleships: the dreadnoughts *Petropavlovsk* and *Sevastopol* and the pre-dreadnought battleship *Andrei Pervozvanni*. The last was coal-fired, so she didn't suffer from the severe lack of fuel oil which crippled the Baltic Fleet. Fuel shortages meant that *Sevastopol* remained in reserve during the campaign, while *Petropavlovsk* was limited to short-range sorties. Also at Kuzmin's disposal was the protected cruiser *Oleg*.

D

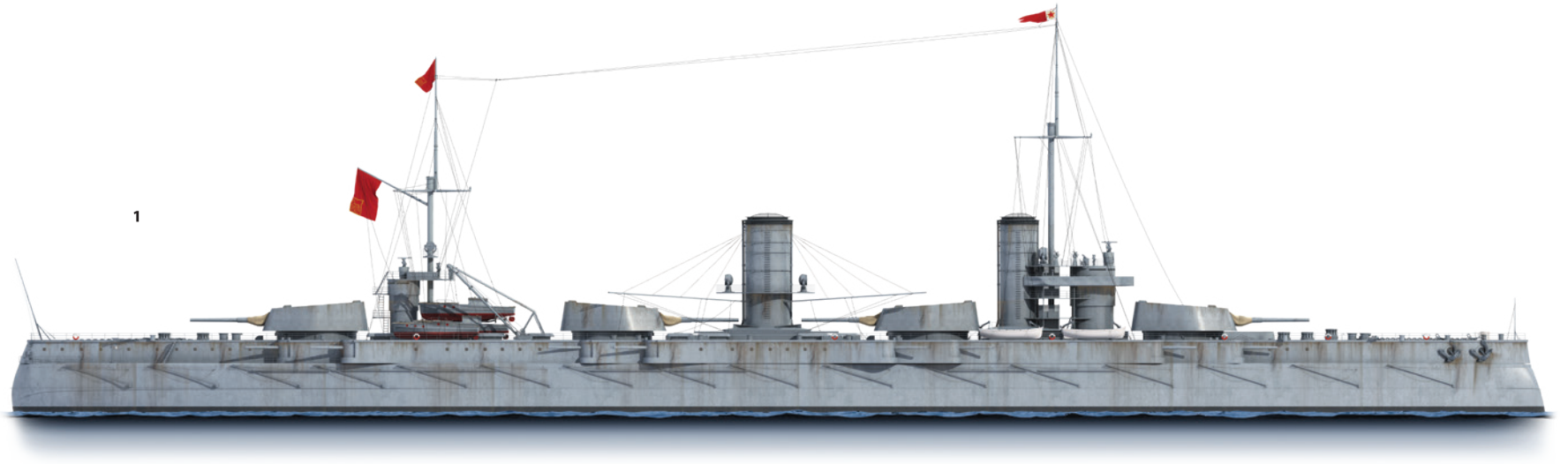
SOVIET WARSHIPS: DREADNOUGHT *PETROPAVLOVSK*, LIGHT CRUISER *OLEG*

1. Dreadnought *Petropavlovsk*

Due to political opposition to naval spending, the Russians were slow to embrace the dreadnought revolution, but in June 1909 four modern 12in dreadnoughts were laid down in St Petersburg. The following year, two more were laid down for the Black Sea Fleet. The *Petropavlovsk* finally entered service just after the start of World War I. Like her three Gangut-class sisters, she served in the Baltic Fleet, but achieved little during the conflict. In early 1918 all but the *Petropavlovsk* were demobilized, and so she formed the backbone of the Soviet Baltic Fleet's Active Squadron. However, she was used cautiously, and so saw very little action against Allied warships during the 1919 campaign. She was renamed *Marat* in 1921, and remained in service until September 1941. This shows *Petropavlovsk* as she appeared in late May 1919, when her fire damaged the British destroyer *Walker*.

2. Light cruiser *Oleg*

The *Oleg* was one of four Bogatyr-class protected cruisers built for the Baltic Fleet, and entered service in June 1904. She survived the Battle of Tsushima (1905) and rejoined the Baltic Fleet in late 1908. During World War I, she played an active part in the naval campaign until hostilities ended following the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. By late 1918 *Oleg* formed part of the Active Squadron and remained a significant threat to the Allies until the night of 17 June 1919, when she was torpedoed and sunk off Kronstadt by Lt Agar in *CMB-4*. This shows *Oleg* as she looked during the 1919 campaign.



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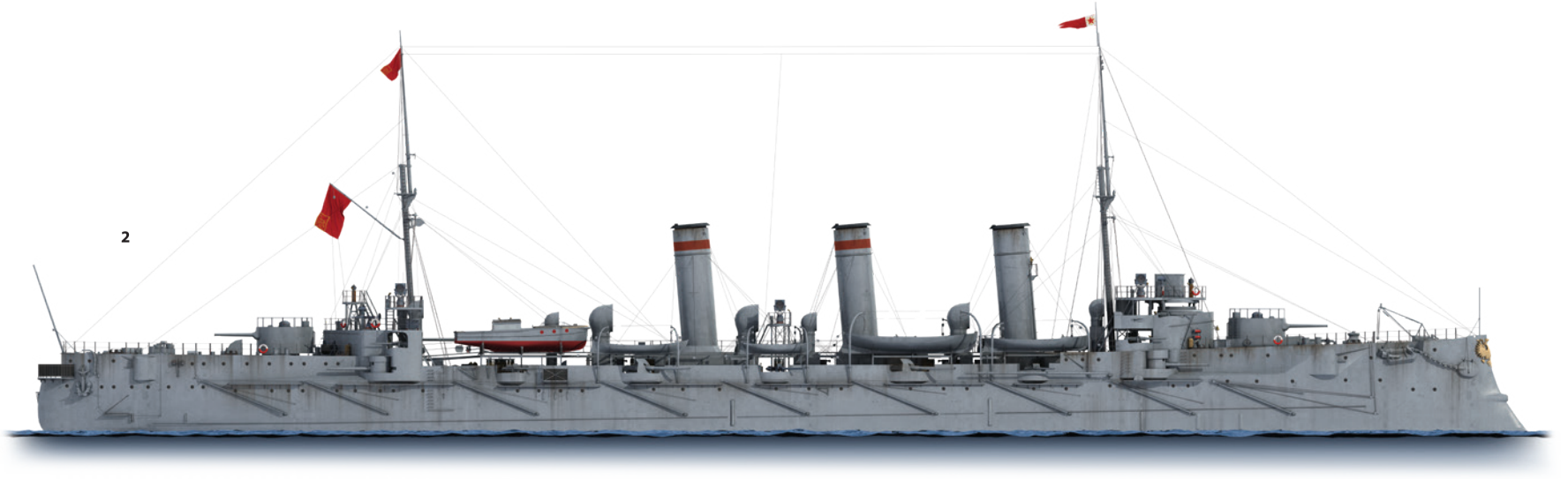

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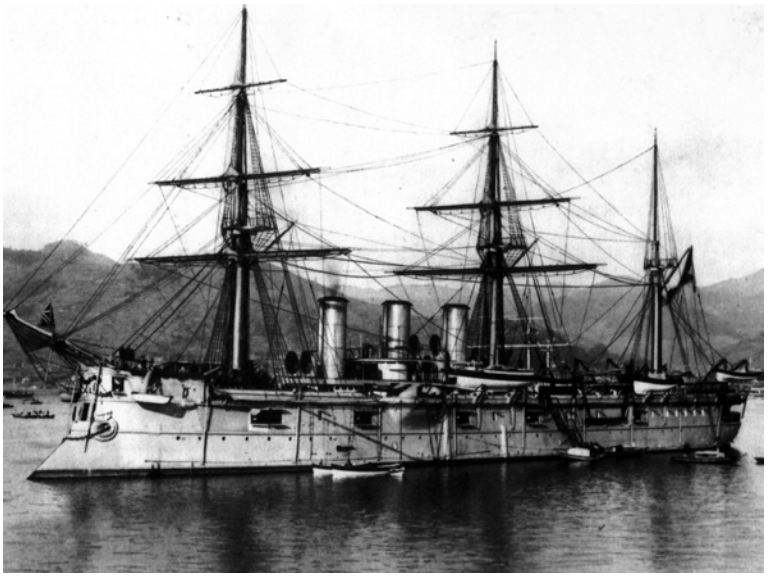


In 1909 the armoured cruiser *Pamyat Azova* had been removed from front-line service, and by 1919 she had become a submarine depot ship, berthed in Kronstadt. Before her loss in August, she acted as a base ship for the fleet's Bars-class submarines.

Officially she was tasked with providing support for the Active Detachment's eight destroyers. Of these the *Azard*, *Gavriil*, *Konstantin* and *Svoboda*, all Orfey or Gavriil classes, made up the 1st Squadron, while the 2nd consisted of *Amuryets*, *Gaydamak*, *Ussuryets* and *Vsadnik*. These four were much older and smaller Gaidamak-class destroyers, launched in 1905. However, they would only be used to form a destroyer screen for larger ships, and were limited to operating within the protective belt of Soviet minefields. That meant it was left to the four larger and more modern destroyers to venture beyond them on offensive sorties.

In addition, seven Bars-class submarines would be available: the *Jaguar*, *Tur*, *Volk* and *Vyep'r* of the 1st Squadron and *Pantera*, *Rys* and *Tigr* of the 2nd. Of these submarines, *Jaguar* and *Rys* were plagued by mechanical problems, and would take no part in the campaign. The others were fully operational, although prone to minor faults, which would limit their effectiveness. These seven boats would be supported by the submarine depot ship *Pamyat Azova*, which was based in Kronstadt, as well as the smaller base ships *Voin* in Kronstadt and *Tosno* in Petrograd, where the 2st Squadron was usually based. Also available were the auxiliary minelayers *Narova* and *Ural*, the former being an old armoured cruiser and the latter previously a German merchantman. Both could carry over 500 mines. A third, smaller minelayer, the *Volga*, was held in reserve.

Supporting the warships of the Active Detachment were two minesweeper squadrons, each of four vessels, plus another five held in reserve. Of these, the 1st Minesweeper Squadron was made up of former Norwegian whalers, which had been converted during World War I. The remainder was made up of purpose-built Russian vessels. Six Bursak-class patrol vessels were also available and used to patrol the River Neva and Lake Ladoga. Finally, there were a number of transport ships in Petrograd, which could be used during any attempted amphibious landings on the Estonian coast. Additionally, Zelenoy had a small naval air arm at his disposal, with a seaplane base at Oranienbaum and an airfield for eight fighter aircraft at Peterhof. Fleet operations were controlled from the fleet headquarters in Kronstadt, although technically Zelenoy also flew his flag in the *Petropavlovsk*. He was supported by a small staff, a fleet intelligence-gathering department and, of course, by the commissars.

The fleet's primary task was to support the 7th Red Army as it advanced westwards towards Reval. However, this meant operating beyond the protective minefields which spanned the eastern end of the Gulf of Finland, and beyond the range of the guns of the Krasnaya Gorka fort, which covered the seaward approaches to Kronstadt and Petrograd. That exposed the fleet

to possible attack, first from Estonian warships, and later from British ones. After the loss of Commissar Raskolnikov, and the reinforcement of the Allied fleet, forays beyond the minefields were limited to destroyer sweeps and submarine patrols. Still, these were handled aggressively, which shows that morale in the Baltic Fleet had improved since 1917–18, and that the Soviets were willing to take greater risks than before. Above all, thanks primarily to the *Petropavlovsk* and the *Andrei Pervozvanni*, the fleet had the raw naval strength to wrest back control of the waters from the Allies, if a suitable opportunity presented itself.

The warships

During the campaign the Gangut-class dreadnoughts, *Petropavlovsk* and *Sevastopol*, were the most powerful warships in the Baltic. They were both completed in 1914, and although these battleships lacked the larger guns of the latest British or American dreadnoughts, their 30.5cm (12in) guns were still extremely potent. Unusually, these were mounted in four triple turrets, and the 25,850-ton dreadnoughts were protected by an armoured belt up to 22.9cm (9in) thick. The ships also carried an extensive secondary armament of 16 12cm (4.1in) guns in casemate mounts. They could make 23kts using either coal or oil. *Sevastopol* though, was non-operational for most of the campaign owing to lack of maintenance and a full crew.

Supporting these powerful capital ships was the 17,400-ton pre-dreadnought battleship *Andrei Pervozvanni* of the Imperator Pavel I class. She entered service in 1912, long after the 'dreadnought revolution'. The battleship was armed with four 30.5cm (12in) guns in two twin turrets, but these lacked the modern fire-control systems of the dreadnoughts, or even the British cruisers. These were backed up by 14 20cm (8in) guns in a mixture of single and twin mounts, and 12 12cm (4.1in) ones in casemates. The battleship was protected by an armoured belt up to 21.5cm (8.5in) thick and it could make a plodding 17.5kts.

The protected cruiser *Oleg*, completed in 1904, was outdated in comparison with her British counterparts, but the veteran of Tsushima (1905) had been modernized in 1916, and boasted an impressive main armament of 16 13cm guns.

The Soviet dreadnoughts *Petropavlovsk* and *Sevastopol*, alongside the outer quay in Kronstadt naval base during the winter of 1918–19.Their 30.5cm (12in) guns had a range of just over 12 miles, and during the campaign they were used to support Soviet naval forays, and to bombard coastal targets.

During the campaign, the 6,645-ton protected cruiser *Oleg* of the Bogatyr class was used to support the fleet's destroyers. Although she was commissioned in 1904, she had been refitted since then, and carried 16 13cm (5.1in) guns in two twin turrets and 12 in single mounts. However, they lacked a modern fire-control system. Although other cruisers, such as the Pallada-class protected cruiser *Aurora* (now a historic museum ship) were available, manning problems meant that they took no active part in the campaign.

The fleet's three-funnelled destroyers which made up the Active Detachment were all based on the pre-war destroyer *Novik*. This was an experimental design which led to numerous others. The first of these, the pre-war Bespokoiny class, was modified to produce the wartime Leitenant Illin, Orfey and Gavriil classes, which were effectively slightly different batches of the same design. *Spartak* (formerly the *Kapitan I Ranga Miklucha-Maklai*) was a Leitenant Illin, *Azard* was an Orfey, while *Gavriil* was the namesake of her class, which also included the *Konstantin* and *Svoboda*. They all carried four 10.2cm (4in) guns in single mounts and nine 45.7cm (18in) torpedo tubes in three triple launchers. These vessels displaced 1,710 tons (1,610 tons for *Azard*), and could make 32kts. The *Avtroil*, captured in December 1918, was an Izyaslav-class vessel, displacing 1,460 tons, and was similarly armed to the others, only with an additional 10.2cm gun. She could make 33kts.

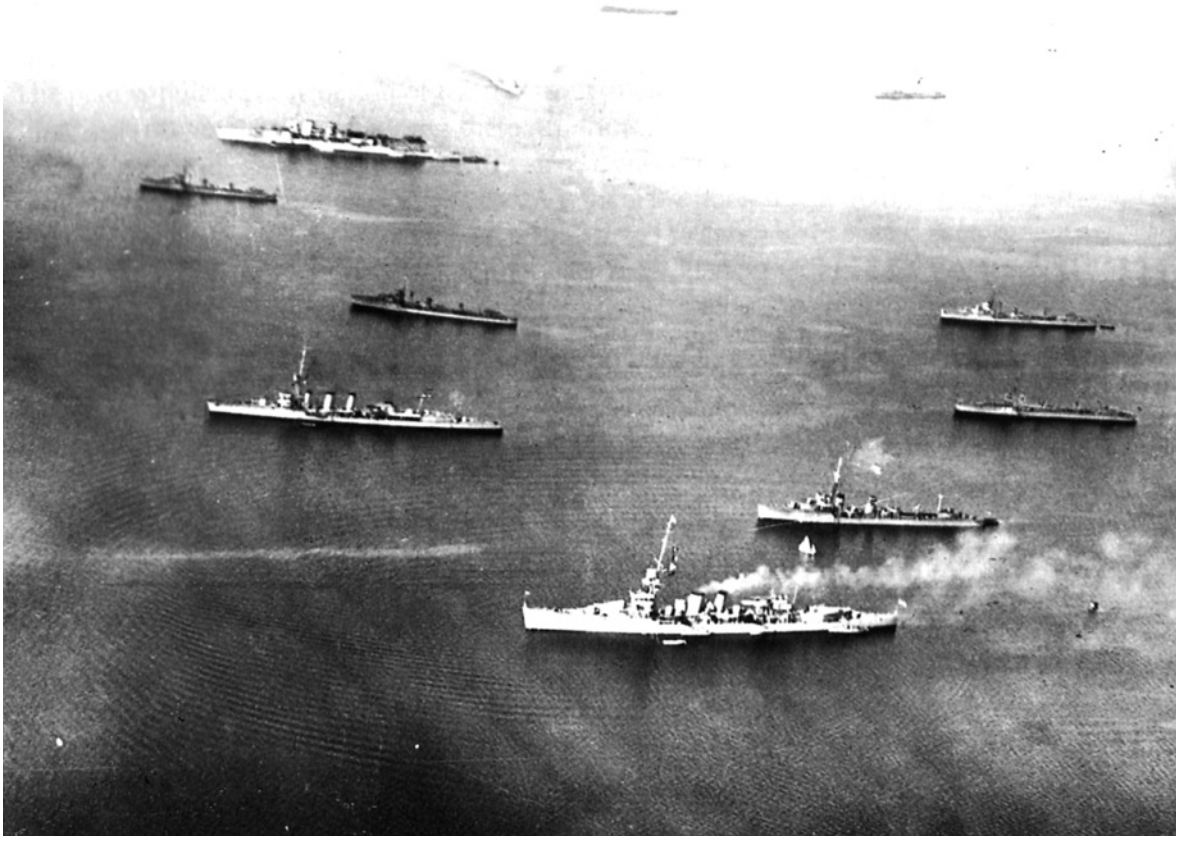
Like her sisters of the Bars class, the Soviet submarine *Pantera* had been built during the war, to a somewhat unusual design. As well as her torpedo tubes fore and aft, she had carrying points for torpedoes along either side of her deck. On 31 August 1919, *Pantera*, commanded by Lt Alexandr Bakhtin, torpedoed and sank the British destroyer *Vittoria*.

Supporting these was a handful of older pre-war Gaydamak-class destroyers (*Amuryets*, *Gaydamak*, *Ussuryets* and *Vsadnik*), which displaced 750 tons and made 25.5kts. They were armed with just two 10.2cm guns apiece, and three singly mounted 45.7cm torpedo tubes, but they were considered too old for active service. Instead, they were kept within the Soviet minefields, to form a protective screen for larger warships. Finally, the fleet contained two small submarine squadrons – a total of seven Bars-class boats. Completed in 1916–17, these displaced 670 tons on the surface and 780 tons submerged. They carried four 45.7cm torpedo tubes (two in the bow and two in the stern), but also had facilities to carry another eight torpedoes – four on each side of the hull – which could be dropped rather than conventionally launched. These boats had mechanical issues due to poor maintenance, but they still proved themselves effective during the campaign.

THE ALLIED FLEET

On 22 November 1918, Alexander-Sinclair received orders to take his 6th Light Cruiser Squadron to the Baltic. At the time, it consisted of his flagship *Cardiff* and four other Caledon- and Ceres-class light cruisers (*Cassandra*, *Caradoc*, *Ceres* and *Calypso*). These were the most modern cruisers in the Grand Fleet, all armed with five 6in guns. They would form the core of the British force, but Alexander-Sinclair's command would also include

R. Adml Cowan's small fleet of light cruisers and destroyers, seen off Björkö in July 1919 from one of the aircraft brought out on board the aircraft carrier *Vindictive*. Cowan's forward base at Björkö lay close to the northern end of the Soviet protective minefields, and so his ships were well placed to react to any Soviet sortie.



nine modern V&W-class destroyers of the 13th Destroyer Flotilla (*Valkyrie*, *Vendetta*, *Verulam*, *Wakeful*, *Wessex*, *Westminster*, *Windsor*, *Wolfhound* and *Woolston*). As the Baltic was known to be sown with numerous German and Russian mines, the force would also include seven Hunt-class minesweepers, drawn from the 3rd and 8th Minesweeping Flotillas (*Cottesmore*, *Epsom*, *Eridge*, *Hambledon*, *Hurst*, *Sandown* and *Tedworth)*.

Also included in Alexander-Sinclair's force were the auxiliary minelayers *Angora* and *Princess Margaret*, which on this trip would be carrying weapons and ammunition in place of their usual cargo. These were earmarked for Estonian and Latvian troops, to be distributed at the Rear-admiral's discretion after his arrival in Baltic waters. On 1 December, when the British ships reached Copenhagen, Alexander-Sinclair learned that the collier *Tregarth*, which was to meet him there, had run aground. While fuel-oil was readily available in Copenhagen, coal was not. So, the Admiral had no choice but to leave his coal-burning minesweepers behind, with orders to follow on once their bunkers were replenished.

Cassandra was lost to a mine off the Latvian coast on 5 December and *Calypso*, *Westminster* and *Verulam* were all damaged in various ways and sent home for repairs. Otherwise, these British warships remained in the Baltic until the end of the year. On 24 December four more V&W-class destroyers of the 14th Flotilla arrived in the Baltic (*Vendetta*, *Woolston* and *Wrestler*, led by Capt Arthur Wood in *Vampire*). When Alexander-Sinclair's force returned home in early January 1919, all these ships returned with him, save the *Angora*, which had already sailed. When he reached Copenhagen on 5 January, Alexander-Sinclair was able to brief his replacement, R. Adml Walter Cowan, who was on his way out to the Baltic. Cowan had his flagship *Caledon*, the namesake of her class, as well as the Arethusa-class *Royalist*. From January, these two light cruisers would become the core of Cowan's small force.

At the time, the light cruisers *Concord* and *Curlew* were in Danzig (now Gdansk), and in early February they were recalled and replaced by *Phaeton* and *Inconstant*, both of the Arethusa class, accompanied by five V&W-class destroyers of the 2nd Flotilla (*Vidette*, *Vimiera*, *Westcott*, *Westminster* and *Wolfhound*). On 19 February, when Cowan left to consult the Admiralty,

E

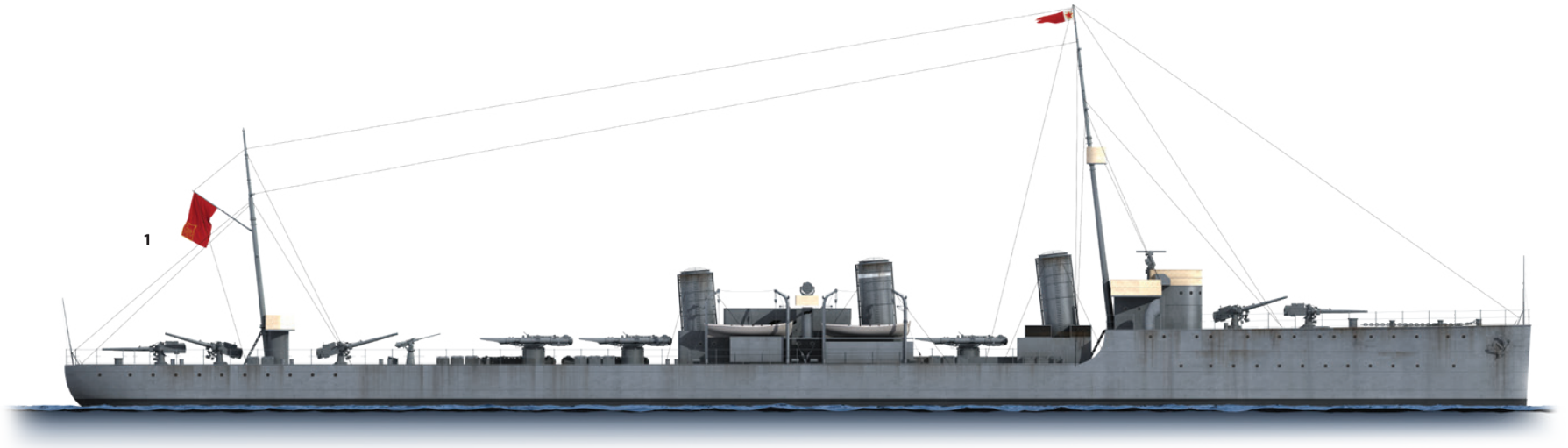
SOVIET WARSHIPS: DESTROYER *AVTROIL*, SUBMARINE *PANTERA*

1. Destroyer *Avtroil*

The *Avtroil*, a vessel of the Izyaslav class, was one of the largest and best-armed destroyers in the Soviet Baltic Fleet. This three-ship class was based on the successful pre-war Novik-class design. *Avtroil* was laid down in the Putilov yard in Petrograd in December 1914, and commissioned into the Baltic Fleet two years later. She carried five 102mm (4in) guns and nine 450mm (18in) torpedo tubes in three triple launchers, as well as a single 63mm anti-aircraft gun. This meant that in 1919 she was better-armed than most of her British counterparts. However, this didn't prevent her capture in December 1918. She was then handed over to the Estonians, who renamed her *Lennuk*, and added her to their small fleet. This shows her as she looked at the time of her capture.

2. Submarine *Pantera*

The 24 Bars-class submarines were the most advanced in the Imperial Russian Navy during World War I, but they compared poorly with German or Western Allied boats. Their engines weren't particularly good, they lacked watertight bulkheads and they were slow to dive. *Pantera* (Panther) joined the Baltic Fleet in mid-1916, and by late 1918 was one of seven Bars-class boats that were still operational. Although she never achieved much during the war, she made up for it on 31 August 1919 when she sank the British destroyer *Vittoria*. This was the most spectacular Soviet success of the campaign.



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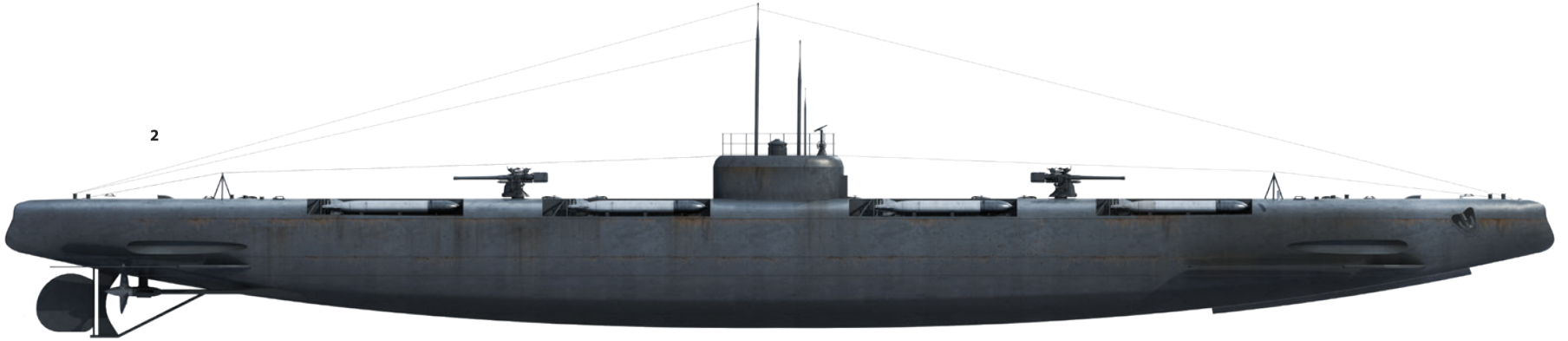

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R. Adml Walter Cowan, a veteran of Jutland (1916) and Heligoland Bight (1917), was given the Baltic command in January 1919. He pursued an aggressive policy, containing the Soviet Baltic Fleet in the Gulf of Finland while exerting complete control over the rest of the Baltic Sea. He was knighted for his services, and later made a baronet.

he took *Caledon*, *Royalist* and the destroyers with him, leaving Capt John Cameron of *Phaeton* in command in the Baltic. When Cowan returned two weeks later, *Royalist* remained in Britain and was replaced by *Cleopatra*, of the Caroline class. Cowan was also given five older S-class destroyers of the 7th Flotilla (*Seafire*, *Searcher*, *Sepoy*, *Scotsman* and *Scout*), and the *Angora*, laden with more arms and ammunition.[3]

Essentially, in addition a pool of destroyers were formed on which Cowan could draw. The 1st Flotilla consisted of the flotilla leader *Wallace*, the second leader *Valorous*, and *Vancouver*, *Vanessa*, *Vanity*, *Velox*, *Verity*, *Versatile*, *Viscount*, *Vivacious*, *Vortigern*, *Voyager*, *Walker*, *Walrus*, *Warwick*, *Waterhen*, *Whirlwind* and *Wryneck*. The 2nd Flotilla was made up of the flotilla leader *Spenser*, the second leader *Shakespeare*, and *Valentine*, *Vectis*, *Vega*, *Venetia*, *Verulam*, *Vesper*, *Vidette*, *Vimiera*, *Violent*, *Walpole*, *Wessex*, *Westcott*, *Westminster*, *Winchelsea*, *Windsor* and *Wolfhound*. The 3rd Flotilla was only partly represented in the Baltic. It was another V&W-class force, consisting of the flotilla leader *Campbell*, as well as *Vampire*, *Vendetta*, *Wakeful*, *Woolston* and *Wrestle*r.

Spenser, *Shakespeare* and *Wallace* were Shakespeare-class flotilla leaders, *Valorous* was a V-class leader, and *Campbell* a Scott-class one. The remainder consisted of V&W-class destroyers. Usually, destroyers were rotated by half flotillas of six to ten ships, or more usually by divisions (quarter of a flotilla) made up of three to five vessels. In most cases, a captain served as a flotilla commander, and a commander as his second-in-command, commanding the other half flotilla. For instance, Capt George Campbell commanded *Wallace*, and since the 2nd Flotilla's *Spenser* wasn't deployed to the Baltic, the flotilla was commanded by Cdr Frederick Strong.

On 19 April, a French contingent arrived, under the command of Cdre Brisson. It consisted of his Enseigne Roux-class destroyer *Mécanicien Principle Lestin*, and the sloop *Ancre*. By May, the French contingent had been increased to 11 Bisson-, Bouclier- and Ensigne Roux-class destroyers and 3 Marne-class sloops. However, the Gueydon-class armoured cruiser *Montcalm* was sent home when she reached Copenhagen, as Brisson considered her too valuable to be risked in such mine-infested waters. In September, her sister ship *Gueydon* would be sent to the Baltic, just to 'show the flag'. The French were willing to work with the British, but due to the French government's political reluctance to fight the Soviets actively, they remained on the western side of the Baltic. Brisson was also unsure whether his sailors would even open fire on their Soviet counterparts if asked.

By late April, the ice in the Gulf of Finland was melting and Cowan needed to be prepared to block the Soviet Baltic Fleet from penetrating any

3 *Seafire* was commanded by Cdr Andrew Cunningham and *Wolfhound* by Cdr John Tovey, both of whom would reach senior flag rank during World War II.

farther into the Baltic. So in late May, the Admiralty sent out the *Royalist* again, this time flying the broad pennant of Cdre Alexander Duff. On his arrival, he assumed command of Allied naval forces in the western Baltic around Libau and Riga, leaving Cowan free to concentrate on the Soviet threat. In early April, *Cleopatra* was replaced by *Caledon*, and so Cowan shifted his flag to her. A month later she was relieved in turn by *Curacoa* of the Ceres class, which had arrived accompanied by *Cleopatra*. However, on 17 May, when *Curacoa* hit a mine, Cowan shifted again, this time into his old flagship *Cleopatra*. *Curacoa* was sent home to be repaired.

Adm Johan Pitka (1872–1944), the bearded figure in the centre, was the commander of the small Estonian Navy during the campaign. He is pictured here surrounded by his naval officers, primarily from the destroyers *Vambola* and *Lennuk*, and the gunboat *Lembit*.

On 23 May, five boats from the 7th Submarine Flotilla arrived in Reval *(L-12, L-16, L-55, E-27 E-40),* accompanied by the submarine depot ship *Lucia*. The force was commanded by the highly experienced Capt Martin Dunbar-Naismith. Five days later the Danae-class light cruiser *Dragon* arrived in Björkö to join Cowan, together with the *Galatea* of the Arethusa class, who was on a diplomatic mission to Helsingfors. When this was completed she joined Cowan's fleet. So, just as the skirmishing in Koporye Bay was at its height in late May and early June, Cowan had his flagship *Cleopatra* at his disposal anchored off Seiskari Island, together with *Dragon* and *Galatea*, supported by six destroyers (*Vanessa*, *Versatile*, *Voyager*, *Walker*, *Wallace* and *Wryneck*) and a rotating patrol in the bay of two submarines. Unfortunately, it was not much of a force if the Soviet Baltic Fleet's Active Detachment wanted to pick a fight.

Maj David Donald's air group, which was transported to the Baltic in *Vindictive*, included three Grain Griffin two-seater reconnaissance planes. The aircraft seen here, while serving on the carrier, was landed before she sailed for the Baltic.

A single-seater Sopwith Camel fighter, of the kind transported to Finland on board *Vindictive*. After establishing an airfield at Koivisto, beside the Björkö anchorage, British aircraft were able to fly regular reconnaissance and photographic missions over Kronstadt.

Meanwhile, in mid-June, the Danae-class light cruisers *Danae* and *Dauntless* arrived off Libau to relieve *Phaeton*, and *Inconstant* was also sent more arms aboard the *Princess Margaret*, which were earmarked for the Livonians. In early July, the *Caledon* returned to the Baltic to replace *Royalist*, and Duff shifted his pennant to her. However, *Royalist* would return in mid-August to relieve *Dauntless*. While watching the Germans in the vicinity of Libau, Duff was greatly assisted by Cdre Brisson and his French warships, particularly the Marne-class sloops *Aisne*, *Ancre* and *Marne*, which operated directly under Duff's command.

Also in mid-June, *Delhi*, a Danae-class light cruiser, arrived at Björkö, allowing him to send *Dragon* to reinforce Duff off Libau. Until she was sent east, *Dragon* had been on guard duty off Danzig. That, of course, left Duff with only two cruisers: his flagship *Delhi* and *Galatea*. At the same time though, he was reinforced by the 20th Flotilla, which was made up of five minelaying destroyers. The flotilla was commanded by Capt Berwick Curtis, and in addition to his flagship *Abdiel*, it consisted of the destroyers *Vanoc*, *Vanquisher*, *Venturous* and *Vittoria*. However, on 1 September, *Vittoria* was torpedoed and sunk off Seiskari Island. After that, Curtis and his remaining destroyers were sent west to reinforce

F

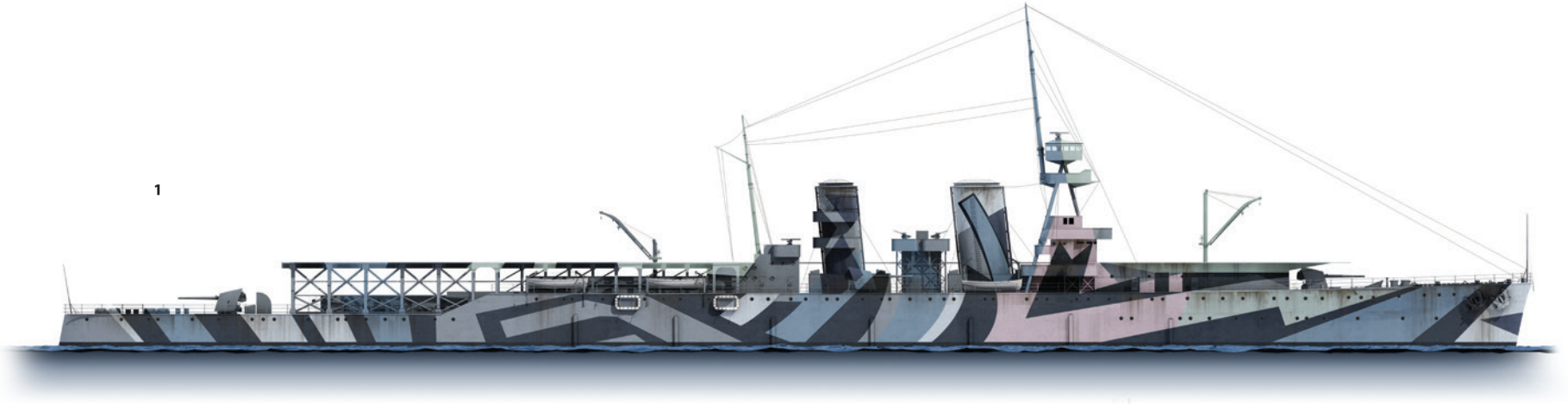
BRITISH WARSHIPS: CARRIER HMS *VINDICTIVE*, MONITOR HMS *EREBUS*

1. HMS *Vindictive*

HMS *Vindictive* began life as the Hawkins-class heavy cruiser *Cavendish*, but she was converted into an aircraft carrier while still under construction. *Vindictive* retained much of her superstructure, but flight decks were added fore and aft and linked by a gangway along her port side. She entered service as *Vindictive* in October 1918, but spent the last month of the war undergoing flight trials. It was soon found that the turbulence caused by her superstructure made her unsuited to safe flying operations. However, in July 1919 she arrived in the Baltic with a dozen aircraft embarked. These were landed at Koivisto in Finland, and were operated from a conventional airfield. Then *Vindictive* was used as a depot ship for the flotilla of British coastal motor boats (CMBs) which carried out the attack on Kronstadt that August. *Vindictive* finally re-embarked her aircraft and returned home in December. During her spell in the Baltic, *Vindictive* was painted in the wartime camouflage scheme shown here. *Vindictive* was eventually converted back into a cruiser in the early 1920s and remained in service until 1945.

2. HMS *Erebus*

A number of monitors of various sizes entered service both before and during World War I, but the largest of them were *Erebus* and *Terror*, which were laid down in late 1915. *Erebus*, pictured here as she appeared in late 1919, carried two 15in Mark I guns in a single twin turret which fired a shell weighing 1,920lb (871kg) up to 29,000yds (26,520m) – the equivalent of just over 16 land miles. Commissioned in September 1916, *Erebus* saw action off the Belgian coast during the war, and in 1919 was sent to Murmansk to support an Allied intervention force there. On her return that October she was diverted to the Baltic. There she bombarded the Soviet-held *Krasnaya Gorka* (Grey Horse) fort; then in November she was deployed in defence of the Latvian garrison of Libau (now Liapāja). This view of her reflects her appearance when she first arrived in the Baltic in October 1919.



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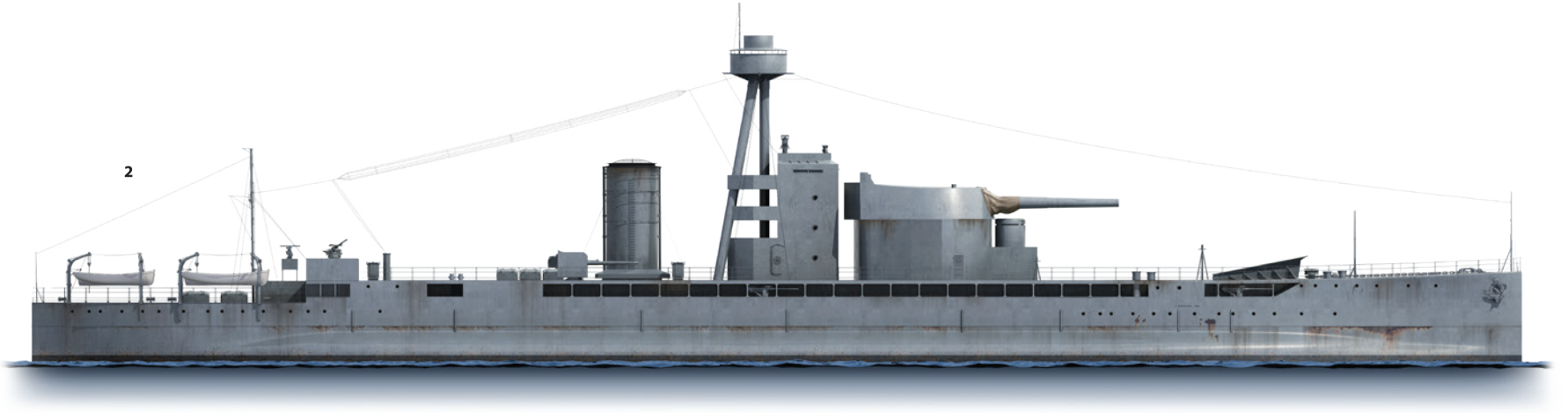

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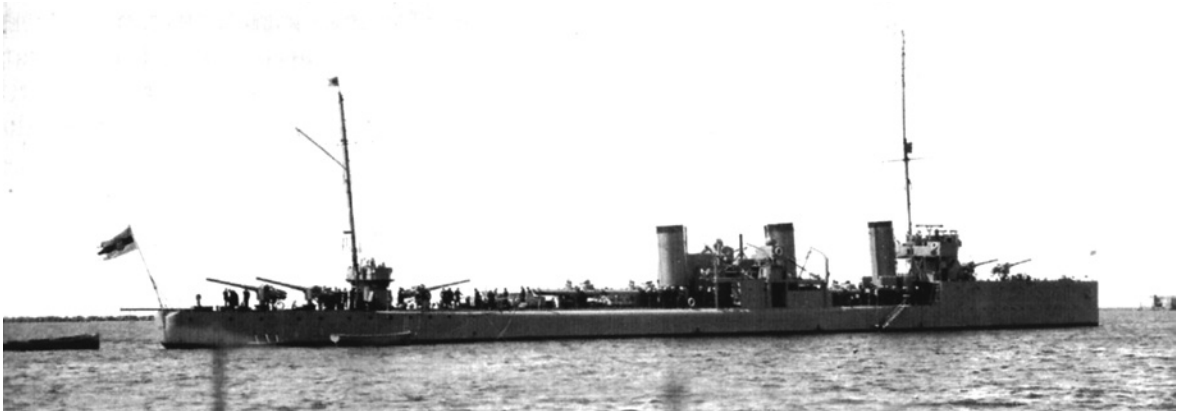


The Izyaslav-class vessel *Avtroil* was one of the largest and most modern destroyers in the Soviet fleet. After her capture by the British in December 1918, she was handed over to the Estonians, who renamed her *Lennuk*. She is shown here flying Estonian colours.

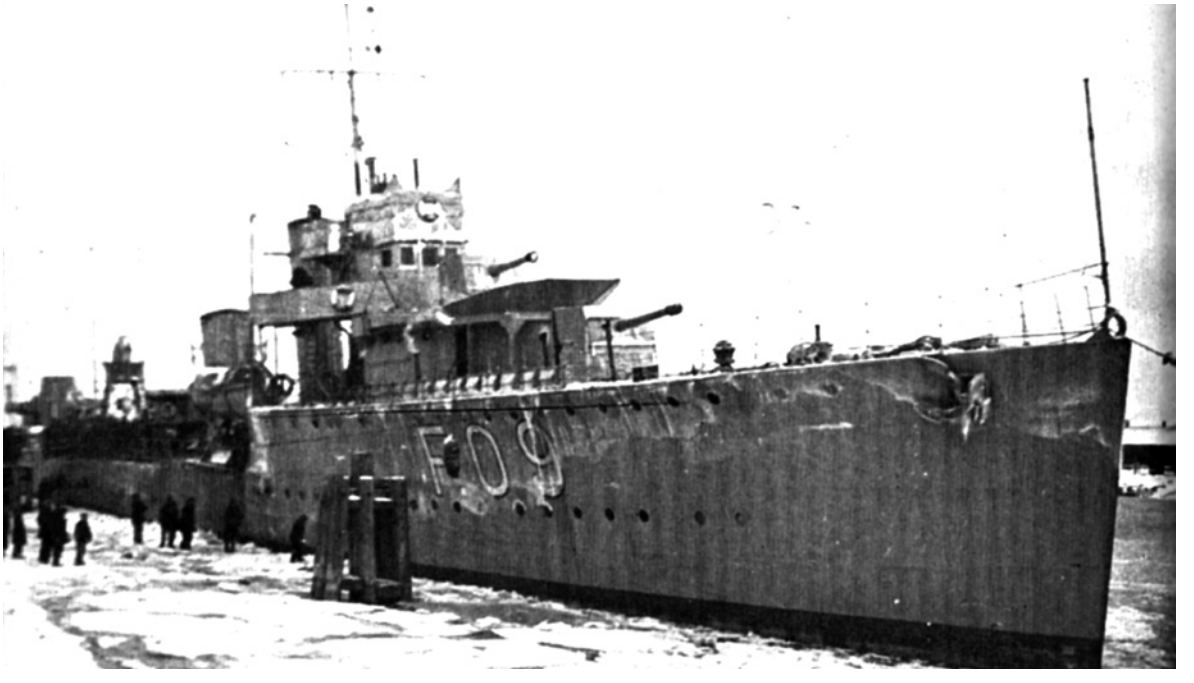
Duff's command.

In early July the aircraft carrier *Vindictive*, commanded by Capt 'Dasher' Grace, arrived off Reval, under the command of the RAF's Maj Donald. The carrier was badly designed for air operations, but her flight deck was extended, allowing her to be used while the airfield was created at Koivisto near Björkö. After that, *Vindictive* was used to ferry more aircraft, spares and personnel between Copenhagen and Koivisto. When not doing this, she served as a depot ship for Cowan's growing force of motor torpedo boats. The first two 40ft boats, *CMB-4* and *CMB-7*, had proved they were able to cross through the Soviet minefields. So, in mid-July, Capt Curtis and his flotilla returned to Britain to collect some more. On 30 July, seven 55ft CMBs arrived in Björkö, under the charge of Cdr Claude Dobson.

On 28 July, when *Phaeton* arrived off Libau to relieve Duff's flagship, the Commodore returned home in *Dauntless*, leaving Capt Curtis of the 20th Flotilla in command. When Curtis's flotilla was temporarily recalled to Björkö, Capt Lawrence Dundas of *Phaeton* took charge in the area. However, on 31 August, after the destroyer *Vittoria* was torpedoed and sunk off Siskoi Island, the valuable minelayers were sent back to the western Baltic. Curtis remained in command there during the growing crisis at Riga. On 13 October, Cdre Brisson took command of all Allied warships there. *Dragon* was damaged by enemy fire while off Riga, and so was sent home for repair in early November, after the arrival of five V&W-class destroyers sent from Britain. That also coincided with the arrival of the monitor *Erebus* off Libau on 7 November. She had first arrived in Björkö two weeks before, but Cowan felt she was needed farther west. Her firepower helped counter the threat posed by Russo–German forces in Latvia, and ultimately contributed to peace in the newly independent country.

The 55ft coastal motor boat *CMB-65*, between the wars. She is similar to the CMBs which took part in the Kronstadt raid in August 1919. These boats could carry either one or two 18in torpedoes on their after decks. *CMB-65* was powered by a Thornycroft V-12 engine.

Meanwhile, in the eastern Baltic, the Allied presence there



The V-class destroyer *Vega*, alongside the main quayside in Reval in early 1919. She and her sister ships of the 2nd Destroyer Flotilla spent much of the year in the Baltic, although *Vega* returned home twice during that time.

was scaled down in the aftermath of the Kronstadt raid. In mid-September, Dunbar-Naismith's submarine flotilla returned home, accompanied by the depot ship *Lucia*. It was replaced by Capt Max Horton's 3rd Submarine Flotilla, made up of six more modern H-class boats, accompanied by the depot ship *Maidstone*. They, however, never saw action during their Baltic deployment. At the same time *Phaeton* arrived to relieve *Danae*, but Cowan retained his flagship *Cleopatra* until she was relieved a month later by *Delhi* and *Dauntless*. *Delhi* duly became Cowan's new flagship. The British cruisers remained in Björkö until *Phaeton* was relieved in early November, and *Dauntless* was replaced by *Dragon* at the end of the month. At the same time, the bulk of Cowan's destroyer force was sent home. *Vindictive* would leave too, first for Libau, to land aircraft to be gifted to the Estonians, and then on the 21st she sailed for home.

Following Cowan's return to the Baltic, a new deployment policy was begun. For the remainder of the campaign, British warships would be rotated every six to eight weeks, as service in the Baltic was considered particularly arduous. This meant that there was a frequent change of cruisers and destroyers in Cowan's fleet, although the Rear-admiral could retain ships for longer if the circumstances demanded it. For the most part, the destroyers were drawn from the 2nd and 3rd Flotillas, detached from the Atlantic Fleet, but in June the 1st Flotilla would also be deployed to the Baltic, together with the bulk of the 20th Flotilla, the destroyers of which had been converted to minelayers.

On 28 December, Cowan finally returned home as well with his remaining cruisers *Delhi* and *Dragon*, accompanied by his four remaining destroyers. Horton's submarines followed in early January 1920. On Cowan's departure, command of Allied naval forces in the Baltic reverted to Cdr Duff, who had returned to the Baltic in late November, accompanied by his flagship *Caledon*, the Danae-class cruiser *Dunedin* and 16 R-class destroyers of the

4th Flotilla. The French contingent left too, apart from three sloops, which were transferred to Duff's command. Duff and his force remained in the Baltic until mid-February, when the signing of peace treaties[4] between the Baltic States and the Soviets allowed these remaining ships to quit the Baltic.

This effectively brought this undeclared naval war to a close. By the end of the year the Soviet Baltic Fleet was icebound again and Cowan had returned home, together with most of his ships. Only Cdre Duff remained with a small force of cruisers and destroyers, and a few French warships, to help maintain the peace. The intention had been to send more British warships to the Baltic in early 1920, including two capital ships. However, by May it was clear that there would be no more fighting. The focus then was to safeguard the hard-won peace. The independence of the Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia and eventually of Lithuania too, had been won through their peoples' resolve to protect their right to self-determination in the face of Soviet and German aggression. This freedom could not have been achieved though, without the support of the Allies, and in particular, of R. Adml Cowan and the ships and men of the Royal Navy.

There was also an American presence in the Baltic, in the shape of a small flotilla of destroyers. However, they were there to support the United States' missions ashore in Estonia, Finland and Latvia in the distribution of food supplies, as part of the American Relief Administration's humanitarian initiative in the region, led by Herbert Hoover. These were detached from R. Adml Harry Knapp's European Squadron, based in the Mediterranean, and consisted of the destroyers *Maddox*, *Kalk* and *Cowell*. Their task was to protect the large number of American merchant ships used in the relief effort, which was coordinated from Copenhagen, with offices in Libau, Riga, Reval and Helsingfors. From April to August 1919, two Italian destroyers were also operating in the Baltic, but their main purpose there was to show the flag – they never ventured farther east than Danzig.

4 Estonia signed the Treaty of Tartu (Moscow Treaty) on 2 February, Lithuania signed the Soviet–Lithuanian Peace Treaty on 12 July and Latvia signed the Latvian–Soviet Peace Treaty on 15 August 1920.

G

ALLIED WARSHIPS: BRITISH CRUISER HMS *CALEDON*, ESTONIAN GUNBOAT *LEMBIT*

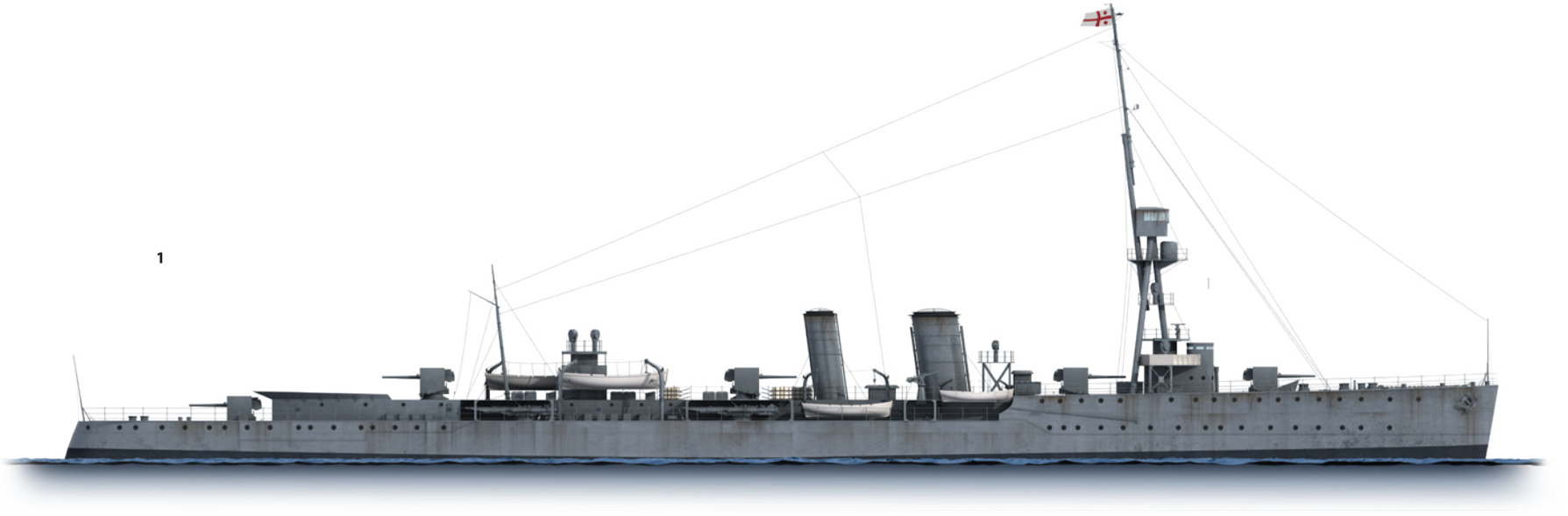
1. British cruiser HMS *Caledon*

In 1911, the Admiralty developed plans for a new generation of fast light cruisers. The first of these was the three-funnelled Arethusa class, which was just entering service as war broke out. During 1919, four Arethusas would see service in the Baltic. They were followed by a modified version, which became the Caroline class, and the design was altered again to produce a two-funnelled version. These were repeated in the Cambrian class, and slight modifications resulted in the Centaur, Caledon and Ceres classes. *Caledon*, namesake of her class, saw action off Heligoland Bight in late 1917, and in early 1919 she served as R. Adml Cowan's flagship in the Baltic. She spent two six-week deployments there, before finally returning home in late summer. Her appearance is typical of the British light cruisers deployed in the Baltic that year, and only differed from *Arethusa* and *Cleopatra* in the number of their funnels.

2. Estonian gunboat, *Lembit*

The gunboat *Lembit* began life as the Imperial Russian warship *Bobr* (Beaver), but she was abandoned due to mechanical problems in 1917, and captured by the Germans in 1918. The Germans repaired her, renamed her *Biber* (also Beaver), and used her as a support ship, based in Reval. Following the Armistice, she was handed over to the Estonians, who refurbished and rearmed her, and by early December she had become the largest warship in the fledgling Estonian Navy. For the next few months she supported amphibious raids behind Bolshevik lines, then when the Gulf of Finland froze she operated around the Gulf of Riga, supporting the Latvians. After the ice melted, she returned to the Gulf of Finland, and remained in service there for the duration of the conflict. This shows *Lembit* as she appeared in early 1919, while operating off Narva.

1



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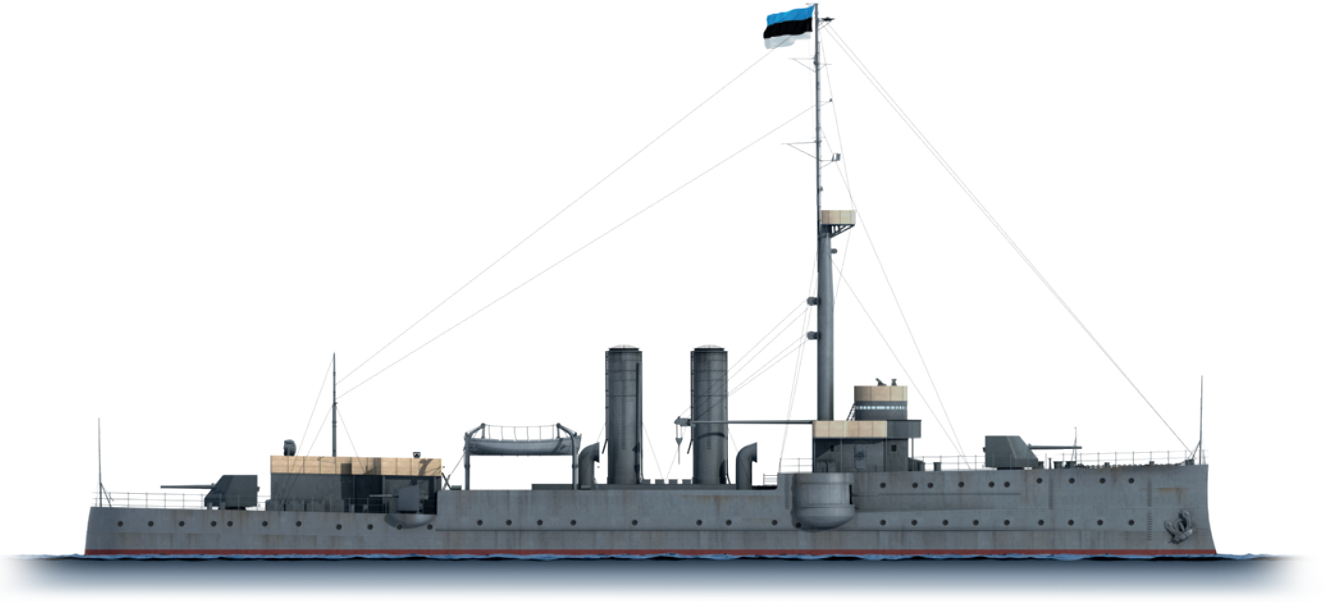
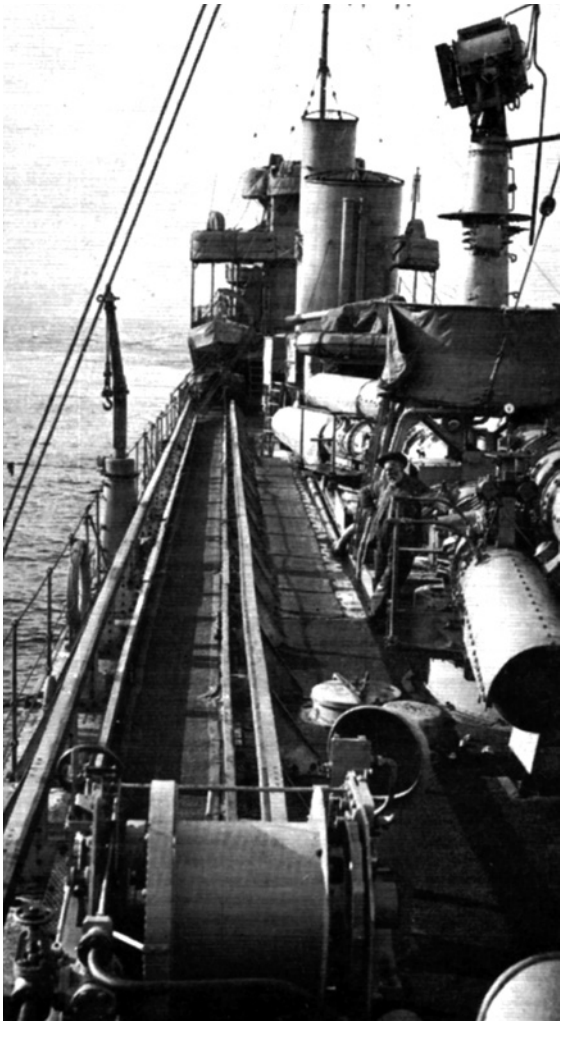




The destroyer flotilla leader *Walker* was one of several British destroyers in the Baltic that had been converted to carry mines. These were laid from rail tracks fitted on either side of the ship's after superstructure. In May 1919, she received two glancing hits from 12in shells fired by the dreadnought *Petropavlovsk*. Surprisingly, neither hit caused major damage.

During this long deployment, the policy of rotating ships meant that the large number of British warships played a part in the campaign. These included no less than 26 cruisers, 85 destroyers, 18 minelayers, 20 submarines, an aircraft carrier and a monitor. In addition, numerous auxiliary supply ships were also sent to the Baltic to support the warships, as well as a hospital ship. Of these, one light cruiser, two destroyers, one submarine, two minesweepers, seven CMBs and one store ship were sunk. In terms of aircraft, *Vindictive*'s original 12 aircraft were augmented by more during the course of the campaign. In all, a total of 55 British aircraft took part.

Despite this sizeable number of warships, in material terms, the Allies were always weaker than the Soviet Baltic Fleet during this campaign. That the Allied naval force emerged from the campaign with such credit is largely due to the professionalism of its commanders. The first of them, R. Adml Alexander-Sinclair, commanded a cruiser squadron at the Battle of Jutland in 1916, and was mentioned in dispatches. His ability to deal with the complex situation he encountered in the Baltic was hampered by the lack of direction received from his superiors in government or the Admiralty. He had to make up policy as he went along, which for him included his support for the emerging Baltic nation states. His successor, R. Adml Walter Cowan was similarly constrained, but showed an even greater willingness to interpret his vague orders as he saw fit. An aggressive, pugnacious commander, Cowan quickly attained a moral dominance over his Soviet counterpart.

Cowan was ably assisted by Cdre Duff, who in 1914 had won fame by ramming and sinking a U-boat with his cruiser *Birmingham*. So, while as aggressive as Cowan, he also had the ability to grasp the complex political situation in the western Baltic. Like Alexander-Sinclair before him, he developed a strong bond with the Latvian and Estonian governments. He was assisted by Acting Cdre Brisson, an energetic French commander who was keen to support the Allied effort in the Baltic, despite the limitations imposed on him by his superiors.

Finally, before the Russian Revolution, the Estonian Adm Johan Pitka (1872–1944) had been a sea captain, and the owner of a salvage business. From early 1917, his efforts were devoted to national defence, and on 21 November 1918, when the Estonian Navy (*Merevägi*) was formed, Capt Pitka became its head. At the time it was not much of a command – its only real warship was the former Russian gunboat *Bobr*, abandoned by the Germans and now renamed *Lembit*. Still, in late December of that year the British handed over the captured Soviet destroyers *Avtroil* and *Spartak*. These

became the Estonian *Lennuk* and *Vambola*. Following their acquisition, Pitka became an admiral. He was described as a commander of energy and character, whose fiery enthusiasm made up for his lack of formal naval training. In contrast to their Soviet counterparts, the Allies were well served in their senior naval officers – men who could be relied on to get the job done.

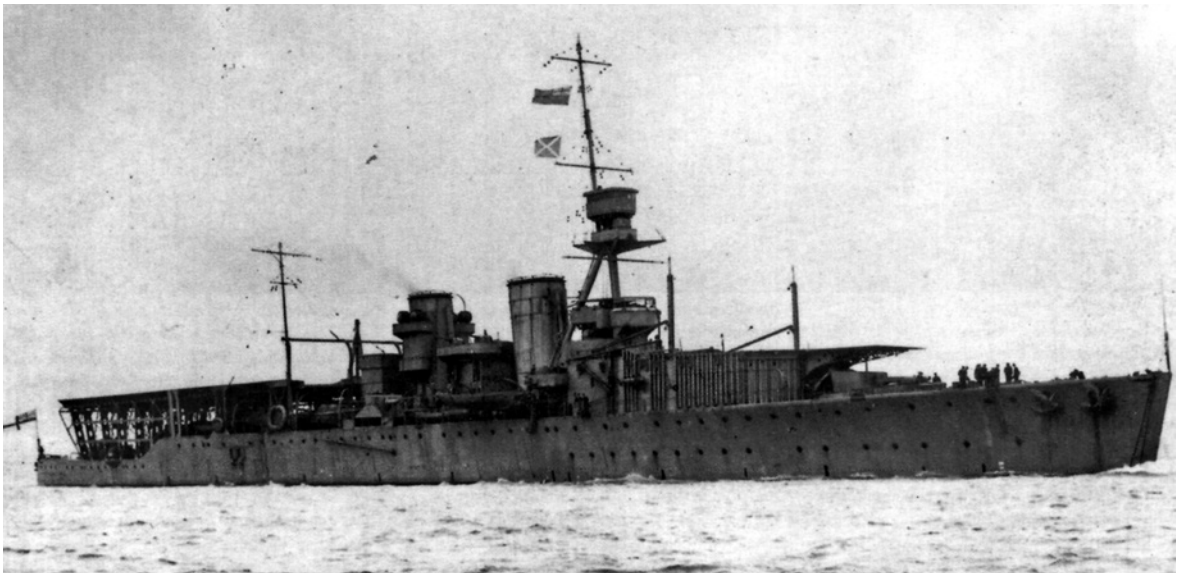
In 1918, the Royal Navy was a highly trained and thoroughly professional fighting force. With men such as Cowan in charge of its Baltic fleet, it was able to contain a much more powerful opponent, and gradually reduce its will to fight. By the end of the campaign, Cowan enjoyed unfettered control of the Baltic Sea, from Copenhagen to the approaches of Kronstadt. The motor boat attack on the Soviet naval base that August demonstrated that even there the Soviets were vulnerable to attack. For the sailors manning Cowan's ships, service in the Baltic was unpopular. It was hard, dangerous and for many it delayed their longed-for return to civilian life. Morale suffered, and on some ships anchored for months off Björkö the general discontent led to mutinous rumblings. This was why the Admiralty was so keen to rotate the Baltic warships during 1919. However, in every case, when called upon to fight, the sailors lived up to the highest standards of the service.

The light cruiser *Calypso* was part of Alexander-Sinclair's 6th Light Cruiser Squadron, but she returned home for repairs after striking an underwater obstruction off Libau. She would return to the Baltic in time to take part in the capture of the Soviet destroyers *Avtroil* and *Spartak*.

The warships

All of the British light cruisers were similar to each other: completed during World War I and armed with 6in guns. The oldest were the three-funnelled Arethusas, such as *Phaeton* and *Royalist*, displacing 4,400 tons, and armed with three 6in guns as well as secondary and anti-aircraft batteries and torpedoes. They were capable of making 28.5kts. *Cleopatra*, a Caroline

The destroyer *Vendetta*, alongside other V&W-class destroyers in Port Edgar near Rosyth, shortly after World War I. She was first sent to the Baltic in December 1918, as part of the 14th Flotilla, then returned the following summer with the 3rd Flotilla.



Vindictive was laid down in Belfast as the cruiser *Cavendish*, but was completed two years later as an aircraft carrier. She lacked a full flight deck, and instead had two smaller ones fore and aft of her superstructure. During the campaign, she was primarily used to transport aircraft to the Baltic theatre, although raids on Kronstadt were also launched from her. After the war she was rebuilt as a cruiser.

class, was slightly larger, with 4,733 tons displacement, but carried a similar armament. The Caledon class was similar, but two-funnelled and slightly larger, with a displacement of 4,950 tons. The ships carried five 6in guns, and could make 29kts. *Cardiff* and *Curacao*, of the Ceres class, were similar to the Caledons, but displaced 5,020 tons apiece, and their main guns were better positioned. The most modern were the Danae class, which included *Dragon* and *Delhi*. They were the largest British cruisers in the Baltic, displacing 5,870 tons, and also the best armed (following lessons learnt at Jutland), with six 6in guns, and 12 21in torpedo tubes, rather than the eight in the earlier cruisers.

Most of the destroyers were of the V&W class, commissioned during 1917–18. They displaced 1,490 tons, were armed with four 4in guns and four 21in torpedoes and could make 34kts. The Ws, however, carried six torpedo tubes. The destroyers of the 20th Flotilla were converted to carry up to 72 mines, but lost their after gun and all of their torpedoes. Several smaller S-class destroyers took part in the campaign. These displaced 1,075 tons, carried three 4in guns, four 21in torpedoes and they could make an impressive 36kts. Several larger flotilla destroyer leaders took part as well,

H

HMS *EREBUS* ENGAGING THE BERMONTIANS, 14 NOVEMBER 1919

The war of independence following the Russian Revolution brought chaos to Latvia, as pro-Bolshevik, pro-German and independent Latvian forces vied for control of the fledgling country. By late 1919 the biggest threat to Latvian independence was the Western Russian Volunteer Army led by the adventurer Gen Bermondt-Avalov, a force largely made up of former Russian POWs and German Freikorps troops, including the Iron Division. Although it claimed to fight Bolshevism, this army served its German paymasters, whose aim was to quash Latvian independence and establish a pro-German government in its stead. In early November these pro-German forces attacked Riga and surrounded the Livonian port of Libau (now Liepāja). On Friday 14 November Bermondt launched an all-out attack, which overran the outer defences of the port. The monitor *Erebus* was one of several British warships whose guns supported the defenders. Her 15in guns pounded the 'Bermontian' troops on shore to the north of the town, and at one point the monitor was firing over open sights, as she lay within 2,500yds (1.4 miles) of the shore. After stopping the attack, she then fired a rolling barrage which drove the Bermontians back, inflicting very heavy casualties.

R. Adml Cowan's flagship *Caradoc*, en route from Libau to Reval in April 1919. The light cruiser is seen here in company with the *Princess Margaret*, an auxilliary minelayer, which was first commissioned in 1914. When this photograph was taken, she was laden with rifles and ammunition, rather than mines.

such as *Campbell*, *Shakespeare* and *Wallace*. These were built in 1917–18, and were generally larger than the other destroyers, displacing over 2,000 tons and armed with five 4.7in guns and six 21in torpedo tubes. The three flotilla leaders named above could all make 36kts.

The British submarines deployed in the Baltic were either E-class or L-class boats. The Es were the older class, built between 1913 and 1917, displacing just over 800 tons when submerged and armed with five 18in torpedo tubes in the bow, beam and stern. They could make 15kts on the surface and 10kts when submerged. The larger and more modern Ls, which were built between 1917 and 1919, displaced 1,074 tons when submerged, and carried six 18in tubes – four in the bow and one on each beam. They were two knots faster than the older boats on the surface, but also made 10kts when submerged, working under electrical power. The H-class boats that replaced them were built at the same time as the Ls, but displaced only 550 tons underwater and carried four forward tubes, albeit designed for 21in torpedoes. They had a top speed of 13kts on the surface, and 10kts underwater. Generally though, these submarines achieved little during the Baltic campaign – certainly much less so than the torpedo-armed motor boats deployed there.

The two 40ft coastal motor boats and the 55ft versions which followed them to the Baltic were powered by petrol engines capable of making 25kts for the smaller boats, and up to 36kts for the larger ones. They displaced 5 and 11 tons respectively and usually carried a three-man crew. They were usually armed with one or two light machine guns and a single 18in torpedo, carried in a stern trough. A few of the boats could carry two torpedoes. These were dropped over the stern and were activated when they hit the water. They certainly proved their worth during the campaign, sinking a battleship, a cruiser and a depot ship, although several of the boats were lost due to enemy fire or mechanical failure.

The two largest British warships to take part in the campaign were the aircraft carrier *Vindictive* and the monitor *Erebus*. The carrier began life as a Cavendish-class heavy cruiser, but she was converted during building by the addition of a flying-off platform forward of the bridge, and an alighting deck behind her funnels. The two were joined by a small gangway along the ship's port side. The finished vessel displaced 12,200 tons, and could make just over 30kts. However, by retaining the superstructure, *Vindictive* was poorly suited to aircraft operations because of the turbulence problems this created.

The flying-off deck was lengthened while the carrier was in the Baltic, and she was used for flying operations before a safer land-based airstrip was available.

Erebus, the namesake of her two-ship class, was an 8,450-ton monitor armed with two 15in guns in a single turret. While she could make only 12kts, and was an ungainly looking vessel, her saving grace was her guns. They had a range of just over 16 miles, and with aerial spotters the monitor's fire could be directed with considerable accuracy. *Vindictive*'s high explosive shells, weighing 0.85 tons apiece, had immense destructive power, and during the closing stages of the campaign they were used effectively against both coastal fortifications and enemy troop concentrations.

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OSPREY PUBLISHING
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
Kemp House, Chawley Park, Cumnor Hill, Oxford OX2 9PH, UK
29 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, Ireland
1385 Broadway, 5th Floor, New York, NY 10018, USA
E-mail: info@ospreypublishing.com
www.ospreypublishing.com

OSPREY is a trademark of Osprey Publishing Ltd

First published in Great Britain in 2022
This electronic edition published in 2022 by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: PB 9781472851666; eBook 9781472851659
ePDF 9781472851673; XML 9781472851642

Index by Zoe Ross
Typeset by PDQ Digital Media Solutions, Bungay, UK

Osprey Publishing supports the Woodland Trust, the UK's leading woodland conservation charity.

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